A study of the education welfare officer working to improve school attendance.

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Abstract

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Truancy is currently (DfES, 2001) right at the top of the government's list of educational issues to be addressed. On any one-day, 400,000 pupils who should be in school are absent. That is 5% of the school population. The education welfare officer (EWO) has a very specific role in supporting a school to maintain high levels of attendance but these figures indicate there is clearly a need to examine ways in which different Education Welfare Services (EWSs) and their officers tackle school non-attendance. The research documented in this study set out to examine the working practice of EWOs engaged to improve school attendance.

The methodology employed to do this comprised of a postal questionnaire, 16 in-depth interviews over a six-month period and a two-year action research investigation in one 'failing' secondary school. The lead methodological approach has been the interview technique that has enabled the researcher to pursue the collection of data as part of a social process. The research strategy involved a survey of 90 EWOs and from this sample 16 volunteers were sought to take part in the next phase of the research.

The research findings strongly suggest the status and position of the EWS within education hierarchy is not at all clear. Issues regarding practitioner's title, training, supervision, skills required, qualifications and interventions have all been discussed leading to a conclusion that the EWS needs to be professionalised, the role of the EWO needs to be specialised and basic administrative tasks need to be undertaken by an administrator. The findings from this study are entirely in keeping with evidence from other research in that there are no national guidelines; staff tend to disagree with the fundamentals of their job; some staff do not work in partnership with schools; others try to change what happens in a school without the position and authority to succeed. However, this investigation has taken matters a stage further by extending this knowledge through interviews with EWOs and managers to develop a model of effective practice that has been tried and tested.

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter One: Setting the Context

1.1 Introduction

The author started this research because, as a practising Education Welfare Officer (EWO), it was apparent there was no consistency of practice or approach. It appeared to the author that if a child was experiencing attendance problems it depended on the individual EWO attached to the case, as to the level of mediation and support the child received, or to an increased likelihood of ending up in a Magistrate's Court. This is an unfair system. The question arises as to what has happened to equality of opportunity for the child and helping every child to reach their full potential. It is important as a professional to adopt and practise equal opportunity policy in every day working practice. It is equally important to maintain and include all pupils regardless of level of attendance.

The research documented in this study set out to establish effective approaches administered/implemented by the EWO to improve school attendance. The fundamental aim of the research was to identify successful interventions used to improve attendance. A further aim was to determine the training requirements of practitioners in order to implement them. It is the premise of this thesis that, for the EWO to be effective, it is important to return the non-attender to full-time education within a minimum of 12 weeks or a maximum of 24 weeks. The study was undertaken as part contribution to a doctorate degree and was conducted between 1997-2000.

It should be noted that throughout this study, for ease of reading, the terms Education Welfare Service (EWS) and Education Welfare Officer (EWO) have been used, although some services were titled Education Social Work Services and their staff Education Social Workers (ESWs). Additionally, throughout the text the term 'parents' will be used to encompass lone parents, two parents, stepparents, guardians and carers.

1.1.1 Aims of study

Nationally the education welfare services appear to have diverse development levels with some services adopting a more professional identity and others continuing to

operate along the more traditional lines. The result is that there is no national standard of service provision or of EWO *modus operandi.* The working practice and training of the EWO varies, depending on the individual local education authority's values and resources. With this in mind the intention of this study is to explore current professional practice in school non-attendance situations and to consider the training that is required for effective intervention to take place. The aims of this study are:

- to gain a new understanding of the process applied to the EWO working with the school non-attender
- to clarify the remit of the EWS and of EWOs and to consider if the service is effectively organised to deliver its remit
- to explore the use of a number of methods of intervention, which appear to be practised unevenly throughout the EWSs.

1.2 Non-attendance

Pupil non-attendance has been an ongoing issue of both public and government concern. The establishment of a clear link between crime and truancy (The Audit Commission 1996) and the publication of the Social Exclusion Unit report (1998) on truancy and exclusion prompted the government to commit themselves to a one-third reduction in truancy levels by 2002.

A consultation document 'Tackling Truancy Together' (Department for Education and Employment, 1999b) points out that improvements in standards of education at school can be achieved only if children attend regularly. It goes on to say that, on any one day, 400,000 pupils who should be in school are absent. About 50,000 of these are away without permission (Winchester, 2003: 26) and an estimated 7.5 million school days are missed each year through truancy. This supports the findings reported in the 'Truancy and Social Exclusion' document (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998) which states that truancy and exclusions from school have reached crisis point. No one knows precisely how many children are out of school at any time because of truancy or exclusion. But each year at least one million children truant, and over 100,000 children are excluded temporarily. Some 13,000 are excluded permanently (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). The problems for the government, and the implications for society, are that the thousands of children who are not in school on most schooldays have become a

significant cause of crime and it means that around 5 per cent of pupils are not taking full advantage of the education they are being offered.

1.2.1 Social Inclusion

Regular school attendance is not just about academic achievement; it is also about the concept of social inclusion (Collins, 1998: 3). Access to educational opportunity is important in shaping the lives of young people in our society. The 1998 average unit cost of educating a secondary aged pupil in England at a mainstream school was around £2,400 and at primary school the cost was around £1,700. The direct costs of educating pupils with whom the mainstream sector cannot cope are much higher. For example, a place in a pupil referral unit costs around £10,000. At present this applies to about 8,500 pupils per year (DfEE, 1999b:3). £85 million per annum. Furthermore, the average cost of sending a child with emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBD) to a residential school is about £40,000. A place at an EBD day school costs on average about £18,000. There are around 600-700 pupils at EBD residential schools and 25,000 are at day schools. In total, expenditure is over £100 million per annum (DfEE, 1999:3).

The DfEE's document *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* (1999a) explains the legal framework regarding school non-attendance and gives guidance for LEA policies aimed at recruiting and training EWOs. On the other hand, these are only guidelines and the document states that each LEA, as the employer, will determine precisely what qualifications, skills and experience to require of applicants for EWO vacancies. Potentially, the EWS has a major role in providing an essential service for children and young people. However, not only has the government failed to appreciate this and define the role more clearly but also the haphazard resourcing of education welfare has meant a consistent professional response has been difficult to develop.

1.3 Why do truants truant?

There are many reasons why pupils truant from school. Since school non-attendance includes different forms of absence, including genuine illness and truancy, defining it is problematic. School absenteeism is a multi-causal phenomenon influenced by social, institutional, environmental, psychological and legislative factors. Recent literature has

highlighted the complex causes that can underpin pupil non-attendance, such as curriculum disengagement and family and peer influence (O'Keeffe and Stoll, 1997; NFER, 1999). Other reasons include personality clashes between pupils and teachers, intimidation at the size of the school, bullying and school phobia. For the purpose of this study all absenteeism shall be referred to as school non-attendance and cases reported will have an attendance rate of 50% or less and remain unauthorised by the school.

1.3.1 Reasons for non-attendance

It has been suggested by an experienced EWO that 'pupils truant because they can, it is as simple as that' (Fletcher, 1999), the implications of this suggestion being that some parents are not as responsible as they are required to be (requirement by law to ensure child receives regular full-time education), schools are not as vigilant as they should be (if school receive no contact from family on the first day of absence a member of staff should contact parents and confirm) and EWOs are not as officious or effective as they could be (by enforcing the law).

Research has shown that parental values and expectations have a huge impact on a child's school attendance (Lyons, 1973; Robinson, 1978; Blyth and Milner, 1998; Collins, 1998). According to the *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* document (DfEE, 1999:10), parental influence is critical in shaping pupil attitude and behaviour. Additionally, first day response, a quick and consistent response from the school can raise a school's attendance by 5 to 10 per cent (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998:6). The report *Missing Out* found there were very mixed approaches by Education Welfare Services in tackling truancy (Audit Commission, 1999). The Commission found that EWOs were in some cases spending more time on other jobs, such as checking on child employment legislation, and dealing with education provision of those children who had been excluded from school, rather than making more effective use of attendance data (Audit Commission, 1999: 40).

1.4 The role of the Education Welfare Officer

The role of the EWO, acting as the representative of the LEA, is to identify the school non-attender and to engage effectively with the child/family and school in order to

avoid sanctions often becoming the 'person in the middle'. However, the inclusion of 'welfare' in their job title, and the decision in some areas to assume the title of Education Social Work Service, signifies another dimension to their work.

1.4.1 Role Dichotomy of the Education Welfare Officer

The dual role of enforcement and welfare does raise concerns of how individual officers deal with the issues of achieving a balance and the role of prosecution. Thus EWOs play their part in maintaining social control and social acquiescence. But in turn officers can experience alienation from their work and low status compared to other professionals. The EWO could be likened to the disadvantaged helping the disadvantaged. The limited power of EWOs (they are after all delivering instructions from the more powerful 'people at the top') makes them feel powerful over the disadvantaged. It can be argued that the government is providing the EWS in an attempt to help parents meet their duties. On the other hand it could be said that the 'caring' hand is really an act of control.

Recent researchers (Reid, 1988, Atkinson, et al 2000) have highlighted a 'professional dichotomy' within the EWS. It was thought to originate partly from the varied training backgrounds of many EWOs, some of whom were entirely untrained, others partially, whilst the remainder held full academic and/or professional qualifications. More recently, Collins (1998) drew attention to this issue and reported that the majority of EWS employees had no relevant training in teaching, social work or other related professions.

In the context of this research the problem with regard to the role, tasks and social position of the EWO is how the practitioner maintains a balance between the social control tasks and the supportive role. These issues will be discussed at length in Chapter 5.

1.5 Influence of EWO

The motivating force to work with school non-attenders appears to be the initiative of the individual officers in their respective local authorities supported by guidelines. Like

all professionals, EWOs are expected to use initiative within a framework pioneered by the collective ethos of the professional association National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE). However, those who act as control agents (as EWOs effectively do) are faced with day-to-day interpretations, administration and application of the formal rules with goals defined for them by their superiors. They are faced with the practical problems of enforcing those formal rules for they have to wrestle with the actions and reactions of their subjects and the many organisational demands imposed on them (Vass, 1984: 44). By applying discretion they interact with their client, interpreting actions they become policy makers in miniature. Application of rules may not be as consistent as expected because the EWO invents and develops techniques unique to the specific situation.

The EWO then has a dual role; it is a similar role to that of the probation officer, prison warden, security officers, health visitors and debt collectors (Vass, 1984: 44). The EWO is a caseworker who supports families; s/he is a good example of a professional who sits in the middle of an area of social control versus social welfare. In their role as a bridging service, Vass (1984: 44) suggests the EWO can be compared with the notion of 'man (*sic*) in the middle'.

1.6 Consequences of non-attendance

1.6.1 Educational Achievement

The document 'Truancy and Social Exclusion' makes a connection between truancy, educational failure and criminal activity. According to the DfEE truants do badly at school. Their reading ability and examination results are far worse than children who attend school regularly (DfEE, 1999b: 2). Studies show that the reading scores for truants are often well below the levels expected of children their age. It is more likely that they will leave school without the qualifications that will stand them in good stead later in life. For example, according to a recent strategy document from the DfEE, only 8 per cent of truants obtain 5 or more GCSEs at grades A to C, compared with 54 per cent of those who have never truanted in Year 11 (DfEE, 1999b: 5); 38 per cent of truants reported they had no qualifications at all. Pupils who are doing badly at school, who are likely to get poorer results at GCSE, are more likely to have unauthorised absence because they get so little from their education.

O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) would argue that the number of truants is far greater than government figures indicate. Their study of Year 10/11 pupils, indicated that there were far more acts of post-registration truancy than of blanket truancy (not registering) citing rejection of the national curriculum as the cause. Pritchard et al (1998) assert that social disaffection in young people, a feeling of exclusion from society and its advantages, is likely to result in the withdrawal of commitment towards education and socially acceptable behaviour.

There is now clear evidence of a chain linking childhood poverty to teenage parenthood, reduced rates of staying on at school at 16, increased chances of contact with the police and higher risk of low wages and unemployment (DSS, 1999). The costs of educational underachievement are represented by, not just lost opportunity, unfulfilled potential for the individual and reduced quality of life, crucial though these are, but also in the long term financial costs to the economy and society generally. Costs include the direct financial cost of combating underachievement and disaffection, including crime and payment of unemployment benefits.

1.6.2 Crime

The findings of the Social Exclusion Unit suggest that many of today's non-attenders are in danger of becoming tomorrow's criminals and unemployed, indicating that time lost from education is a direct 'cause of crime' (SEU, 1998: 1). It is not possible to present an accurate picture of the trends in the nature and extent of crime committed by young people aged 10-17 because much crime is unreported and a substantial amount of reported crime is not cleared up. In 1997, there were 172,900 known offenders in England and Wales aged between 10 -17 years old (Crime and Criminal Justice Unit, 1999:12). The commonest offences known to have been committed by young offenders are theft and handling stolen goods. For example, in London it has been estimated that 5 per cent of all offences are committed by children during school hours. 40 per cent of robberies, 25 per cent of burglaries, 20 per cent of thefts and 20 per cent of criminal damage in 1997 were committed by 10 to 16 year olds many of whom were regular truants (SEU, 1998: 1).

Recent figures issued by the government indicate that nearly 60 per cent of convicted young people aged 16-17 years old were unemployed and not in full-time education on their date of sentence (Crime and Criminal Justice Unit, 1999: 15). Research findings on the relationship between failure at school and delinquency are relatively conclusive (DfEE, 1999: 3). Many studies have made the links between educational underachievement and crime. For example, a Basic Skills Agency study in Shropshire found that of 500 convicted offenders, 64% said they were habitual truants (DfEE, 1999: 3). A Home Office report (DfEE, 1999b) suggests that truants were three times more likely to commit crime than non-truants. Another study found that 78% of males and 53% of females who truanted once a week or more committed offences (Graham and Bowling, 1995) and a 1994 study indicated that one in two prison inmates had serious difficulties with literacy (compared with one in six of the general population) (DfEE, 1999).

1.6.3 Unemployment

Those who miss school are more likely than their attending peers to be out of work at age 18 and claiming unemployment benefits (Youth Cohort Study Report No. 54). According to the DfEE (1999c), truancy is associated with the inability to settle into the routine of work, frequent job changes, becoming a teenage parent, poverty, higher separation and divorce rates and the involvement with social workers and social services (DfEE, 1999c: 5). Young people aged 16-17 years are generally excluded from receiving benefits as unemployed people, although figures for 1999 show some 14,000 young people made claims (Department for Social Security, 1999). A report from the Office of National Statistics shows that in the year 1999 there were 298,200 18-24 year olds unemployed; of this number 254,000 were recipients of job seekers allowance, which is currently paid at an average weekly amount of £35.61 costing the government an estimated £47 million per annum. The long-term underachievement at school has a knock-on effect for adults in the work force. The DfEE reported in 1999 that seven million adults in this country have no qualifications; about eight million people have qualifications no higher than NVQ level 2; and the UK lags behind France, Germany, the USA and Singapore in the proportion of our workforce qualified to NVQ level 3 (DfEE, 1999c: 2).

Apart from the educational consequences for the truant, research indicates that truancy does have repercussions later in life and can have serious consequences for the wider community for example in the results of criminal behaviour and the cost of unemployment benefits. Statistics show that at any one time 161,000 or 9% of young people between 16 and 18 years old are outside education, training and work for long periods after the school leaving age of 16 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 8). This is the group of young people who the system has failed and who need to be identified early and worked with at a more intense level.

1.7 Legal Responsibilities

LEAs have a legal duty to ensure that all registered pupils of compulsory school age attend school regularly. Parents are responsible for making sure their children go to school, they have a vital role in ensuring their child attends regularly. The principal function of the EWS is to enforce regular school attendance by helping parents and LEAs meet their statutory obligations. Although the EWS is not a statutory service, it is often the means by which LEAs respond to a range of statutory duties placed upon them. One of these duties is to prosecute parents, under Sections 7 and 444 of the 1996 Education Act, who fail to ensure that their child, of compulsory school age, is receiving an efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude. This duty, covering all schools including independent, foundation and voluntary aided schools, is usually carried out by EWOs.

EWOs are responsible for carrying out a range of statutory welfare duties on behalf of the LEA (Whitney, 1996), therefore they are they are not employed directly by the schools, so they have always retained a measure of independence from school managers and administrators (Blyth & Cooper, 2000: 2). The state creates its own legitimacy via laws, channels of action and structures. For example, police authorities employ police wo/men in order to ensure the law is not broken; schools employ teachers in order to instruct our children on how to be law abiding citizens; the provision of welfare to the needy is controlled and assessed by social workers. For those who break the law, prisons are 'policed' by prison officers, and school attendance is 'policed' by EWOs who have a primary duty to enforce attendance.

1.7.1 Legislative framework

The school and the EWO are concerned with the same population and their functions may be carried out consecutively or concurrently. While the functions of these two systems may be relatively constant their aims and objectives vary according to shifts and changes in societal standards. These are usually reflected in legislation and directives, which have to be interpreted. The EWO works in a large bureaucratic organisation with the head of service dictating the role and, discussed in more detail in section 2.4.2, the officer works within the legislative framework set out by the 1996 Education Act and the 1989 Children Act. On the one hand, the law states in section 7 of the 1996 Education Act that parents must ensure that their child receives a full-time education and it is the duty of the EWO to enforce the law; on the other hand the legal framework provided in the Children Act 1989 is about providing support for children and families within a partnership.

If parents fail to ensure that their child attends school regularly, despite EWS intervention, they can be prosecuted and if found guilty, fined. Current figures show that if a parent is summoned to court because a child is not attending school, a staggering 80 per cent fail to turn up (DfEE, 1999). However, since April 2001 the government has increased the school attendance offences to level 4 of the national scale of penalties to empower Magistrates to require parents to attend court or risk arrest. Although this means that parents can now face fines up to a maximum of £2,500 each with a minimum fine of £250, the government, rather than impose higher fines hopes to dissuade those parents, who in many cases are on low incomes, from condoning their children truanting from school (DfEE, 1999).

Additionally, LEAs may apply to the Family Courts for an Education Supervision Order (ESO). The ESO was introduced following the 1989 Children Act (S36) and has replaced the Court's power to accommodate a young person in local authority care for school non-attendance. The ESO is designed to ensure that the child in question receives full-time education suited to age, ability, aptitude and special educational needs, and sufficient support, advice and guidance are provided under LEA supervision to the parents and child; this means that the child's welfare is paramount. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 has given Courts the option, where a parent has been convicted

of failing to secure a child's attendance at school, of imposing a Parenting Order for up to 12 months.

1.7.2 Implementing the sanctions

The role of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) in monitoring and promoting school attendance has been established for over 100 years. In order to prevent prosecution, the role of the EWO, through close co-operation with the school, has been to assist and encourage (Ofsted, 1995) the parent/s to fulfil their responsibility of ensuring their child receives an education. EWOs are members of a team based within the LEA and work closely with schools, parents and pupils to try to sort out attendance issues. The officer becomes involved in offering the pupil/pupil's family encouragement, one-to-one support, making parents aware of their responsibilities with regard to school attendance and school expectations - often acting as a bridge between home and school. There are times when a child should not or cannot return to school, and the EWO will arrange alternative provision, such as home tuition with a local authority tutor, or an admission to a Pupil Referral Unit which helps pupils who have problems with settling in school. They will also liaise with other local authority departments and agencies, such as Social Services, local Housing and Health Departments, and the Educational Psychologists in order to help the child return to school.

Additionally, the EWO as an employee of the LEA is in a position to facilitate a resolution in disputes between parents and the school, which may be the cause of non-attendance. While it is helpful for parents to see the EWO as independent of the school, it is also helpful that, as a LEA employee, the officer is also seen as an authoritative figure enforcing the law. The element of independence afforded by being officers of the local authority permits them to challenge and objectively criticise school practice. The EWO is an important link between schools, families and other local services to try to resolve problems when children do not attend school.

1.8 Resolving the problem of non-attendance

The core responsibilities and duties of the EWO have continued to be central to the policy of combating school non-attendance (Ofsted, 1993, 1995; Whitney, 1994). In a recent study (Pritchard et al, 1998) the most important finding was the central

importance of the pupil's relationship with their EWO, and the practical help and guidance received, indicating the potential of the EWO in combating truancy. However, in 1999 the government launched a £500m initiative to cut truancy, unruly classroom behaviour and expulsions. This will be achieved over a three year period with funding being made available through the 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support' grant to fund effective action against truanting. At the Public Policy Seminar (November 1999) *on Truancy, Bullying and Exclusion*, Schools Standards Minister Estelle Morris set this target:

> Children get only one chance at school... We want to break the cycle of poor attendance, low educational achievement and the damaged prospects for adult life by reducing truancy and school exclusion by a third by 2002. (Estelle Morris 1999).

A spokesman for the Department for Education and Employment in a personal communication told me of possible changes to the role of the EWO:

> there is a disparity in performance amongst EWOs, some see their role as advocates and it is totally inappropriate. The government want to see the role of the EWO change and it must be resolved in a cost effective way; the government is currently considering the possibility of the EWO being school based and school managed. (DfEE, October 1999).

A recent Audit Commission report *Missing Out*, while recognising the difficulties which faced EWOs, found that local authorities had very mixed approaches and results in tackling truancy stating 'Some Authorities perform very well in tackling unauthorised absence, but others do little more than the legal minimum required' (Audit Commission, 1999: 41). The Commission found that EWOs were in some cases spending more time on other jobs, such as checking on child employment legislation, and dealing with the educational provision of those children who had been excluded from school. In response to the Commission's report and the findings of recent Ofsted LEA inspections, the government sees a case for changing current arrangements for addressing the issue of non-attendance.

1.8.1 Strategies for improving attendance

The most recent, and possibly most controversial, DfEE proposal for improving attendance set out plans for schools to both take the responsibility for and provide the

resources to promote good attendance, on the basis that attendance is considered an integral component of school improvement (DfEE, 1999a). School-based and locally managed EWOs would, according to the report, enable schools to respond more quickly to incidences of non-attendance. There is no doubt that such a move would have major implications for the role of the EWS.

Clearly, the suggestion from the government is that the current practices of some EWOs are not effective in improving attendance and they feel that schools should be given more responsibility and resources to tackle truancy with the possibility of managing the EWO's caseload. This would see the introduction of secondary school-based and locally managed EWOs, a concept currently piloted in twelve LEAs across the country. Furthermore, in the White Paper, *Learning to Succeed* (DfEE, 1999c), the government committed themselves to setting up a single coherent strategy aimed at all young people - the Connexions strategy -with the Connexions Service, a support service for all young people, as its centrepiece. The strategy will give young people access to the highest standard of education and training and give them the best possible support in the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Statutory agencies, the voluntary sector and specialist private sector businesses will work together to provide every young person with access to a Personal Adviser. The adviser will provide a range of support to meet the young person's needs and help them reach their full potential. Within this climate of change this could be an opportunity for the EWS to re-evaluate its working practice style and service organisation.

1.9 Outcomes of EWO Intervention

Operationally, enforcement of attendance is fulfilled through the EWS. The EWO is a law enforcement agent liaising between local authority, school and families; often in the frontline for decision-making regarding the balance between social control and social justice. Consequently, we need to be concerned about, not only the level of EWO intervention, but how individual officers interpret their role, how EWOs 'negotiate' with pupils and schools, how officers themselves react differently in various situations, and how these activities are interpreted in various ways by others such as pupils, parents and teachers.

By way of illustration, it could be argued that the pressure exerted on parents from the EWO by continued monitoring and observation of the non-attender could create or exacerbate existing problems, and therefore require input from other agencies. For example, a single parent claiming income support and with outstanding debts, would feel under further pressure from the EWS who may be threatening them with prosecution for their child's non-attendance. This in turn would exacerbate the parent's existing problems who would feel unable to cope and maybe unable to care for the child/ren and would, therefore, require the involvement of social services.

1.9.1 Training for EWOs

Historically, the central role of the EWS has been identified by all the major stakeholders as being in or around the area of school attendance. However, how this role is best fulfilled, in terms of practice, ethics and in the broader context of EWS duties has always been questionable. Areas of training envisaged by the Ralphs Report (London Government Training Board, 1974) and Macmillan (1977) have been implemented in some LEAs but this has always remained a minority commitment (Halford, 1994). The question remains as to why this service has been so overlooked.

Clearly one reason is that it has no statutory basis; another is that it falls between three stools - education, courts and social work and has thus made little professional progress. Fitzherbert (1973) suggested another reason as being that most officers are middle-aged men, retired from jobs like the police or armed services, and hence do not have the same ambitions for their second career as they had for their first.

An HMI report found that the majority of EWOs have no relevant training in teaching or social work, or other related professions (DES, 1984). The same report concluded there were often inadequate opportunities for EWOs to acquire appropriate training and qualifications (DES, 1984) Later, the Department of Education and Science (DES) briefly touched upon initial and in-service training and stated that these matters needed discussion and consultation at national and local level (DES, 1989: 6). A positive lead has not, however, been forthcoming from the government about training.

Quite where the blame or responsibility rests towards lack of EWS training is not clear. Blyth and Milner (1989) have suggested that the DES, Central Council of Education Training for Social Workers (CCETSW) and some of the LEAs must share it. Education welfare is the oldest welfare service established by the state and the roots of modern social work, with its emphasis on child-centred interventions, are to be found in accounts of its inception.

1.10 The status of the Education Welfare Service

The EWS department's function is to work with schools in order to raise attendance levels. The culture is one of the professional who sits between diverse rules, expectations and opportunities and his or her personal and professional development e.g. professions that sit uneasily on a continuum of law enforcement/welfare as opposed to control and personal/professional petty events (which dictate daily lives). Inconsistent professional backgrounds of EWOs have been said to taint the status of the profession in the eyes of schools, teachers, social workers and other professionals (Atkinson et al., 2000b). Similarly it has been argued by Reid (1999) that the profession has, for some time, been given a low status. This current research therefore collected information on the professional backgrounds and staff development opportunities within the EWS, with particular reference to implications for effective practice.

So, research indicates a time for change regarding the working practice of the EWO and the government acknowledges this. There have always been a certain percentage of the school population who truant, hence the need for introduction of the 'school boardman' (1800s) and the development of the EWS. But what is worrying as we enter a new millennium, is that the number of pupils who truant, who commit criminal offences during school hours, is not decreasing. If anything, it is increasing (O'Keeffe & Stoll, 1997), which indicates that the strategies used by those who should be enforcing attendance, are not effective. Indeed it is time for change, the service provided by some LEAs has been described as 'old and antiquated'. There is clearly a need to examine ways in which different Education Welfare Services and their officers tackle school non-attendance. This issue will be discussed later.

1.11 Summary

This chapter has looked at the problem school non-attendance presents not only to the non-attender but also for the whole community. In the short-term these young people are not receiving a full-time education. In the long term, under-achievement, criminal record and a future of unemployment are all potential consequences of non-attendance. Whilst there is no doubt the major focus of EWS work is on attendance, the diversity of underlying and associated problems and the various levels at which interventions can be targeted mean that EWOs have to be multi-skilled, adaptable professionals with the ability to develop effective working relationships with young people, parents and a wide range of school staff and a variety of other agencies. A gap exists between the knowledge now available about non-attendance and that related to interventions employed by practitioners involved.

A main aim of this study to gain an understanding of the process applied to working with the non-attender. From what we have discussed hitherto, it would appear that EWOs are not as effective at improving attendance as they could be. The issues that have become apparent are:

- How can EWOs be more effective?
- What actually works in improving attendance?
- What needs to change in order to improve effectiveness?

The intention of this study is to deal with these questions by clarifying the remit of the EWS and of EWOs and to consider if the service is effectively organised to deliver its remit. Chapter 2 will discuss the complexity of non-attendance and present characteristics of school non-attenders. Consideration will be given to the causes and consequences of non-attendance accompanied by a reflection of the contribution made by various authors to reduce truancy. The second part of the chapter turns to the role and tasks of the Education Welfare Service in improving attendance, followed by a synopsis of innovative models for increasing school attendance.

Chapter Two: Non-attendance – a complex issue

2.1 Introduction

Improving school attendance is important if children and young people are to make the most of their educational opportunities. There is a general consensus that a central responsibility of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) is to deal with school attendance (Halford, 1994; Ofsted, 1995). As indicated in the previous chapter, the origins of education welfare lie in the enforcement of compulsory school attendance. Attendance work accounts for about three quarters of referrals to the EWS workload (Audit Commission, 1999). Yet despite being the oldest state welfare service in the United Kingdom, the EWS continues to experience its own problems of 'exclusion and marginalisation' (Blyth & Cooper, 2000).

The importance of school attendance has been underlined by the government's decision to set targets for reducing levels of truancy and exclusions from school (DfEE, 1999b). The government is supporting many initiatives to improve attendance and behaviour in school through a range of grants to local authorities and other agencies worth over £170 million in 2001-02 (DfEE, 1999b). More recently, the government has announced a new £450 million Children's Fund (DfES, 2002) to help tackle child poverty and social inclusion. The fund will help include initiatives for preventative work for 5-13 year olds and their families. Such developments will have an impact on the operation of the EWS, the standards of quality and the training needed for the efficient delivery of the role.

In order to continue functioning as an independent professional group there are three key issues for the education welfare service to address. First, the EWS must clarify its role i.e. should it be a law enforcement service or school social work service? Secondly, as no formal certification at either national or local level is required for EWOs, issues of training, along with salary, must be addressed in order to ensure high standards within the service. Furthermore, alternatives to full-time education must be considered as not all 14-16 year olds will achieve, or want to achieve, the government's benchmark of 5 A-C GCSE passes.

These practical issues are compounded by theoretical dilemmas. It could be argued that the goal of the EWS is to reduce social inequity by ensuring that all pupils get a 'proper' education. On the other hand it could be asserted that the EWS is managed in order to support governments in maintaining tight social control, reducing youth crime, and producing a skilled labour force which can then be used to contribute to the nation's economy. In other words, the EWS can be seen as an agency, which either increases or decreases a young person's personal liberty. Because EWOs, educators, parents and politicians have widely divergent views on this matter, it is difficult to determine a single, 'right' approach for reducing truancy and dealing with the other issues EWOs have to address.

Due to these practical and theoretical problems, as discussed in the previous chapter, the EWS has not been wholly effective in improving school attendance rates. Although the theoretical dilemmas may not be immediately resolved, it is possible to address practical problems, like the lack of training among EWOs. To understand the reason for this ineffectiveness, a clear comprehension of the social, historical, and professional context is needed. The goal of this chapter is to create such a frame through which the problem of improving school attendance can be examined. Therefore, this chapter will explore the following key issues: -

1. The challenges in compulsory education (section 2.2: 30-38): in this section, the challenges implicit to compulsory education will be considered, and the multiple causes of school non-attendance will be outlined. The immediate and long-term consequences of non-attendance will then be reviewed.
2. Theoretical perspectives on truancy (section 2.2.4: 38-50): virtually all authors writing on non-attendance agree that it has negative outcomes for the individual and for society at large. However, there are several theoretical issues that complicate intervention. This chapter will summarise these issues.
3. The Education Welfare Service: Organisational initiatives and structure (section 2.4: 51-63): the current state of affairs in the England and Wales education welfare system will be discussed. The goals and initiatives of the EWS will be noted, and we will show how these ideals have been translated into practice. The organisation structure of the EWS will be described, so that the significance of the operational

context in which EWOs function is apparent. The role of the EWO will be examined more closely.

4. Increasing school attendance (section 2.6: 63-73): there are many factors involved in successful school re-integration i.e. the personal characteristics of the non-attender; his or her family situation; the attitudes, proclivities, and policies of the school; and the availability of educational alternatives or special programming for the noncompliant student.

To this end, the author will look at several innovative programmes operating in the England and Wales, Canada and the United States that have had success in returning pupils to the classroom and keeping them there. These programmes are based on diverse ideological viewpoints; some authors emphasise working with the individual to reduce social phobic or antisocial behaviours, while others put the family at the forefront. There are also a significant number of studies indicating that major school reforms need to be undertaken, to increase programming for pupils who cannot fit into typical school environments.

To date, the EWS has not been highly successful in keeping pupils in schools, and new strategies for working are needed. In 1998, the government introduced revised guidelines and targets for schools, which now mean each school has to reduce its own truancy rate by one third by the year 2002. Ofsted is expected to formally report on any school following an inspection whose rate of attendance fell below 90 per cent. Despite all previous endeavours, truancy continues to be a major social, educational and economic problem (Reid, 1999:4). The interventions discussed in this chapter will be considered within the context of EWOs using as part of their working practice, or perhaps using a streamline version, to resolve cases of non-attendance as well as to improve school attendance figures.

2.2 Challenges in Compulsory Education

Free schooling in England and Wales was established through the 1870 Education Act. The purpose of this act was to offer all citizens an education, as a means of increasing social equity and improving the skills and attributes of the workforce (Williams et al. 2001). Implementation, however, was slow; by 1918, attendance was partially compulsory for children of five to fourteen years of age. The 1944

Education Act replaced the elementary school system with primary and secondary education.

The EWS has its origins in the late nineteenth century as a school attendance enforcement service, a function that to a large extent continues to define its role. The officers of this service, school attendance officers, were originally employed by Education Boards, which had responsibility for providing public schooling in specific local communities. Despite the focus on attendance enforcement, from the earliest days school attendance officers were aware of the impact of personal problems and social and economic disadvantage on children's ability to take advantage on educational opportunities. The introduction of the Welfare State saw the role of the EWO change from focusing on welfare to providing support for pupils in the broader context of school, home and community (Williamson et al. 2001: 98).

At this time the school-leaving age was raised to fifteen, but, again, this was not implemented for several years. In 1973, the school-leaving age was again raised – this time to 16. As of September 1998, the official school-leaving date for all pupils is June of the final year of compulsory schooling –Year 11. It is assumed that the government, in raising the school-leaving age, will encourage all young people to complete their education but for those pupils who find school a difficult place or indeed, the work too difficult, the extension of the official leaving date can only prolong the unhappy experience and thus, may involve the services of the EWO in order to enforce attendance.

The policy of compulsory schooling was questioned by a number of social critics in the 1970s, who expressed doubt about the value of education in western society. This doubt was fanned by the publication of *Deschooling Society* by Ivan Illich in 1971. 'In schools' wrote Illich 'we are taught that valuable learning is the result of attendance; that the value of learning increases with the amount of input; and finally, that this value can be measured and documented by grades and certificates' (Illich, 1971: 60). He argued against this, saying that the existence of a school simply produced its own demands for more schooling, independent of the needs of either learners or the education process itself. This kind of view informed the development of educational practice at the William Tyndale Junior School in

London, where disagreements between teachers over pedagogy and political ideology between 1973 and 1975 brought teaching to a standstill (Williamson et al. 2001: 140).

In an effort to improve perceived declining standards of behaviour in the home and school as well as school attendance, the Lincolns Ralphs Report (Local Government Training Board, 1973) argued that education welfare should be developed as a social work service and some authorities responded to that recommendation. This was a view subsequently rejected by the DES, who argued that the 'services are not an extension of the personal social services' and that the 'EWO is primarily concerned to serve the child in relation to school attendance, not the whole family' (DES, 1984: 1). The tension between roles of the EWO dates from this period.

At this time mounting concern about industrial conflict i.e. the recession, the three-day week and the miners' strike; youth unemployment; urban decline and growing crime rates fuelled consternation about declining standards of discipline and behaviour in both the family and the school. Almost simultaneously, a politically inspired debate about the purposes and practices of comprehensive education arose, prompting the so-called 'Great Education Debate 1976-9' (Carlen et al. 1992: 37). The focus of the Great Education Debate was the apparent failure of schools to ensure a proper link between the vocational preparation of young people and the needs of the economy. This confirmed earlier criticisms of the Black Paper writers (Carlen et al. 1992: 38) that Britain's economic decline was interlinked with a law and order problem. In the late 1970s the ideas generated by the Great Education Debate and from the Black Papers dominated the policy agenda, anticipating the 1988 Education Reform Act.

The Education Reform Act 1988 with its widespread 'reforms' affecting all areas of education was the most important piece of education legislation since the Education Act 1944; the Children Act 1989 was the most significant reform in childcare legislation since the Children and Young Person Act (1969). However, although the 1988 Education Reform Act does not relate specifically to school non-attendance, attempts to include in the Education Bill measures to ensure that schools monitor pupils' attendance throughout the day were defeated in the House of Lords in May

1988, and this defeat helped to establish a political climate within which local initiatives on truancy began to flourish. For example, the Department of Education initiated a programme to improve school attendance, encouraging local education authorities to bid for grants totalling around £2.5 million over three years (Carlen et al, 1992: 58).

2.2.1 Legislation

Legislation in the constituent countries of the UK requires that each child aged between five (four in Northern Ireland) and sixteen must receive 'efficient full-time education suitable to his/her age, ability, aptitude and to any special educational needs he/she may have'. Statistics concerning 'unauthorised' absence from school (i.e. absence that has not been authorised by the school's head teacher) and exclusion have only been systematically analysed since the early 1990s (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998). These reveal that at primary schools 0.5% of school time is lost to unauthorised absence, approximately half the time that is lost to unauthorised absence at secondary schools.

The Education Act 1996 continues to the present day the principles laid down in the legislation of 1876, 1902, 1944 and 1993 in that it requires parents to secure education for their children, and makes the parents subject to criminal penalties if they do not (Collins, 1999:15). Appendix A (pages 254-5) provides a chronology of Education Acts and legislation affecting compulsory education from 1833. Throughout the last century, responsibility for ensuring that parents secure an education for their child has been the legal duty of the LEA, which fulfils this obligation through their EWS, with a remit to provide support for pupils (Ofsted, 1995). The work of an EWO may now extend to a range of duties including special educational needs, assessment of free school meals, child protection, illegal employment of school-aged children and placement of excluded children, in addition to a statutory duty to enforce attendance (Atkinson et al, 2000a).

The principal function of the Education Welfare Service (EWS) is to help parents and local education authorities (LEA) meet their statutory obligations on school attendance. The EWS is not a statutory service, but it is often the means by which

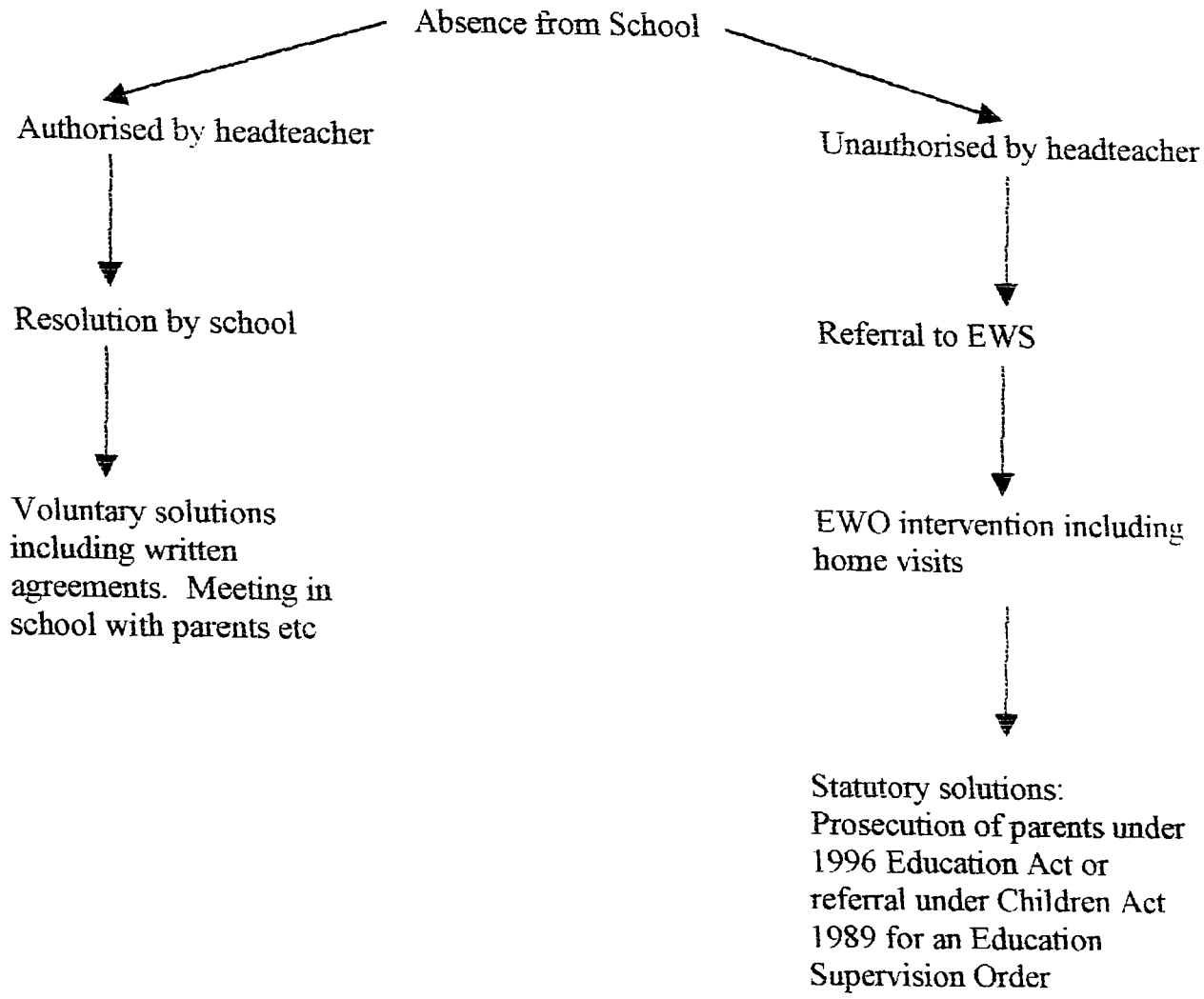
LEAs respond to a range of statutory duties placed upon them. One of these duties is to prosecute parents, under Sections 7 and 444 of the 1996 Education Act, who fail to ensure that their child, of compulsory school age, is receiving an efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude. However, the number of prosecutions is relatively small.

2.2.2 Effectiveness of prosecuting parents

In order to prevent parental prosecution, Education Welfare Officers (EWOs), through close co-operation with the school, assist and encourage families to fulfil their responsibilities (OFSTED, 1995:1). The officer becomes involved in offering the pupil/pupil's family encouragement, one-to-one support, making parents aware of their responsibilities with regard to school attendance and school expectations, often acting as a bridge between home and school. The core responsibilities and duties of the EWO continue to be central to the policy of combating non-school attendance (OFSTED, 1995: 1; Whitney, 1994: 88).

Along the way non-attenders are subjected to a variety of interventions, which are, according to Wardhaugh (1995: 744), designated primarily as either welfare or punishment, and which may bring about for them a range of both intended and unintended consequences. Figure 1 (page 35) sets out the course of school non-attendance careers, charting the routes that non-attenders take through the legal, education and welfare systems:

Figure 1: Table charting non-attenders career (Whitney, 1996:12).



The first agency response to non-attendance generally comes from the school, which defining non-attendance as wilful misbehaviour, responds with a series of punishments, escalating from putting the pupil on 'report' (requiring a system of lesson registration for a specified period of time) to temporary/permanent exclusion from school. At the point at which the school feels it alone can no longer respond effectively to a case of non-attendance, education welfare intervention generally takes place. This service, according to Wardhaugh, is intended to provide support to the child and family and thus to encourage the resumption of regular school attendance. It is acknowledged that an unintended, or perhaps hidden, consequence of this action is that the labelling process is begun in earnest, with EWOs employing a range of categories to facilitate their work e.g. school phobic, school refuser and truant. By this stage, Wardhaugh argues (1995: 744), the construction of the deviant theory of the child's behaviour is well under way.

Finally, the emphasis shifts from welfare back to punishment. If there is no improvement, the parents are referred to the magistrates' court. Legal intervention takes place for the first time at this stage, and the concept of parental responsibility for non-attendance is addressed. The intention is to bring pressure to bear on parents to ensure their offspring's regular school attendance. Wardhaugh's (1995: 757) concept of unintentional consequences is relevant here. The involvement of the parents in the legal process includes them in the categorisation process carried out by both EWOs and by magistrates. Dealing with cases in magistrates' courts also effectively criminalises the status of school non-attendance, and, as Wardhaugh points out (1995: 759), adds a further dimension to the negative labelling process.

'Attendance at School', the 1995 OHMCI report, found that although fines imposed on parents following a successful prosecution vary and are often small, the majority of parents concerned cannot readily find the money. Indeed, the report declares 'there is a widespread perception on the part of schools and LEAs that the deterrent effect of prosecution is very limited and not worth the large expenditure of time and effort involved' (s7.8). In fact, in recent years, with few exceptions, LEAs have rarely taken parents to court. Le Riche (1995: 48) argues that this is because 'the EWOs do not regard the court system as 'effective' and pupils and parents know how to play the system.' A study conducted in Leeds found that as far as a considerable proportion of children taken to court for poor school attendance were concerned, it was the fact of going to court, and the implications of that, which appeared to get them back to school, rather than any particular procedure (Berg et al, 1988: 42). This echoes the findings of Vass (1984: 56) who suggests that it is the threat of prosecution that is effective, not the actual act of prosecution.

However, there is some evidence to show that magistrates are signalling a tougher policy on truants with the imposition of sanctions upon parents. In May 2002, magistrates in Banbury, Oxfordshire handed Patricia Amos a 60-day jail sentence for failing to ensure her two youngest daughters attended school despite two years' worth of warnings from the LEA (Passmore, 2002).

2.2.3 Multi-agency intervention

Regulations and circulars set the context within which schools should work to motivate pupils to attend. To varying degrees, the government and LEA has also looked to the law enforcement officials i.e. EWOs and the police, to keep a cap on truancy, as it is assumed by government officials that this will decrease juvenile delinquency.

Today, legislation on compulsory schooling continues to stress the role of parents in keeping pupils in school. However, the range of legislation also reflects the fact that effective truancy measures must be comprehensive, integrating the services of a wide range of professionals. Reid (1997) explains how different parties were involved in the effort to stop truancy and continue today:

> Parents are bound by law 'to cause their child to receive efficient full-time education ... either regular attendance at school or otherwise.'
>
> Schools are expected to provide education according to children's age, ability and aptitude.
>
> Education authorities are expected to enforce school attendance. This responsibility is usually delegated to the Education Welfare Service.
>
> The police have some duties in connection with children out of school. Recently introduced legislation (Crime and Disorder Act 1998) has empowered police to stop any youngster who should be in school and return them to the school. Some LEAs work with local police forces to mount truancy sweeps in designated areas such as shopping centres.
>
> Social service departments (and others) who have children under their supervision or in their care also have responsibilities to see that these children receive suitable education.

The medical professions who may have responsibilities in connection with the health (either physical or emotional) of schoolchildren are also required to make recommendations about appropriate schooling for these children.

School children themselves are liable to be made subject of an Education Supervision Order if they do not attend school regularly.

Operationally, enforcement of attendance is fulfilled through the Education Welfare Service. However, given the multi-faceted nature of attendance problems, the causes and symptoms of non-attendance often benefit, as outlined above, from outside agency contributions. Social workers, schools, educational psychologists, health professionals, the police, the Youth Service, local businesses and the surrounding community, may all have a part to play in addressing the problem. The DfEE (DfEE, 1999b) recommended multi-agency liaison and the sharing of information at an early stage so that action plans can be devised for improving individual pupils' attendance. The role of other agencies in raising attendance has been audited within a school attendance research project and one of the key findings reflected the need to address problems other than attendance (Atkinson et al., 2000b). In order to inform EWO practice more evidence-based research, concentrating on partnership working, is required.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Literature reviewed of accounts of pupil absenteeism over the past twenty years or so reveals a marked change in emphasis. For example, research in the 1970s focused upon the individual or social aspects of truancy but by the mid 1980s attention had 'shifted' to the education system in general and to individual schools in particular as explanatory factors. Although accounts that focus upon individual 'school effect' in combating truancy currently find favour (in the 1990s), it is, nonetheless, interesting to re-visit some of the earlier findings.

Researchers have attempted to identify common characteristics among non-attenders. These studies break down pupil populations by gender, ethnicity and age, among other variables. In a survey of gender-related research, Bell et al., (1994) found that in all but one study, non-attenders were more likely to be male than

female. However, a 1982 study showed that girls did 'skip' school frequently – but did so with their parents' consent, so they did not qualify as 'truants.' Another gender difference was evidenced in non-attenders' personality traits: female non-attenders demonstrated less antisocial behaviour than male non-attenders, and they had more variable attitudes and behaviours concerning school, their teachers, and their classmates (Bell et al., 1994: 203). In general, boys were more direct and vocal about their dislike of school and their reasons for skipping school.

Another significant variable in school non-attendance is age. As pupils get older, they are more likely to truant. 'Thus the upper grades in high schools exhibit the highest truancy rates' (Bell et al., 1994: 204). For this reason, Jenkins (1997) indicates that middle school is a critical period for truancy intervention; if pupils form a positive social bond with their school, teachers, and classmates between the ages of 10 and 14, they will be less likely to stray away from school as older teenagers.

Bell et al. (1994) also found that socio-economic status (SES) is another important variable in school non-attendance. Carlen, et al. (1992) indicate that in low-income, urban areas, non-attendance rates have always been higher than average, and they suggest that this trend is not likely to change. Two studies conducted in the 1980s corroborate this view; both found non-attendance rates higher among disadvantaged or low-income families (Bell et al., 1994: 204). The study conducted by Bell et al. is a review of the literature regarding the psychopathology of truant behaviour. The aetiology of truancy developed from their research provides support for social structure theorists' contention that truancy is a reaction by a young person to their socio-economic situation.

Although the link between poverty, deprivation and absenteeism is clear, it would be inaccurate to assume that all truants are confined to one social group. Demographic factors may influence the prevalence of truancy, which tends to be higher in inner cities than in rural areas (Reid, 1997: 8) but some young people may be more predisposed to truancy than others. Some young people are '...bored, disaffected and uninterested and may have difficulty sustaining relationships both in

and outside school' (Le Riche, 1995). In which case could be attributed to upbringing rather than any factor mentioned above.

A final demographic variable that has been investigated by researchers is race. Virtually all studies investigating race have found non-attendance rates are higher among black pupils than white (Bell et al., 1994: 204). However, the authors who conducted these studies did not control for socio-economic status, so it is possible that non-attendance is more a function of socio-economic status than race or ethnicity.

2.3.1 The Causes of Non-attendance

The high numbers of truants and rates of truancy are, in part, due to changes in legislation. For example, as the school-leaving age rises, so too does the number of potential non-attenders. But there are many other complex social, cultural and political causes for truancy. In this section we shall explore reasons for non-attendance.

Non-attendance itself is 'not a discrete entity' and 'it is this very complexity that has meant the education welfare officer has never been able to undertake an attendance-enforcement function' (Blyth and Milner, 1991: 223). Corville-Smith et al. (1998) state that school absence is a 'multi-causal problem' and that to understand the problem, variables from multiple domains must be investigated. These domains include a) personal characteristics of the non-attender; b) family factors; and c) school factors. Although educational theorists have always traced truancy back to these three domains, Corville-Smith et al., indicate 'there is a paucity of studies designed to investigate the combined influence of simultaneously operating variables on pupil attendance' (1998: 630).

To counter this omission in the literature, Corville-Smith et al., conducted a multivariate study of the problem. The researchers first considered pupil-based explanations for non-attendance. These included: 1) pupils' social competence in their relation with peers; 2) pupils' perceived self-esteem; 3) pupils' academic self-concept; 4) involvement in antisocial behaviour in class; and 5) the presence of a neurotic disturbance. Reports from previous research suggested that non-attenders are more likely than attenders to have lower academic self-concepts and self-

esteem, and a higher prevalence of anxiety or neuroticism (Corville-Smith et al., 1998: 630-631).

In reviewing past literature, Corville-Smith et al. (1998) also identified several common characteristics among the families of non-attenders. In general, families of non-attenders were characterised by unhealthy interpersonal relationships. More specifically, these families were found to be less accepting of the pupil, and less consistent or deficient in their discipline. Further, there were higher levels of conflict among non-attenders' families; much of this was related to 'clinically significant role performance and values and norms' (Corville-Smith et al., 1998: 631).

The third category that Corville-Smith et al. incorporated into their 1998 study was school factors. They state that 'non-attendance appears to be related to strained and conflict-ridden teacher-pupil relations' (Corville-Smith et al., 1998: 631). Further, pupils may be dissatisfied with curriculum if a) it does not stimulate their interest; b) it cannot be linked to some future application (e.g. employment); and c) it is not flexible in terms of learning rate.

To determine how the three domains – personal, family, and school – overlapped and interacted, Corville-Smith et al. (1998) identified 295 absentee pupils from two high schools in a small city in Ontario, Canada. To be considered an absentee, pupils had to have missed 15 or more classes in any one course during the autumn semester. Pupils who had legitimate reasons for missing classes were not included. The 295 pupils were then asked to participate in the study. Unfortunately, only 27 volunteered to do so. These pupils were given several psychological and behaviour scales to fill out, which could be used to evaluate their personal, home, and school lives. A control group of 27 non-absentees was developed, who matched the absentees in terms of grade, sex, and school.

Corville-Smith et al. (1998) conducted analyses on the data procured. They found that, 'consistent with earlier findings, the absentee and regular attenders differed on most of the measured personal characteristic, family, and school variable with one exception; there was no significant difference between the two groups on the anxiety variable' (1998: 636). In the 'personal characteristics' category, Corville-

Smith et al. (1998) found that absentee pupils had lower self-esteem and poor academic self-concepts. They were less competent in their social relations, and they perceived their families as less cohesive than regular attenders. A significant percentage of the absentees reported parental rejection, and they also perceived 'greater attempts at parental control.' The combined effect of parental rejection and overbearing parental control had negative effects on pupils, in terms of their school attendance.

Absentee pupils also reported less satisfaction with school and poorer relations with school personnel. In fact, Corville-Smith et al. state 'in the present study, pupil dissatisfaction with school was the most important single variable marking a difference between attenders and non-attenders' (1998: 637).

The finding that non-attenders did not experience more anxiety than regular attenders was surprising. For example, in previous research reports, truancy was often associated with neuroticism, in particular, with social phobia. Numerous forms of intervention have been developed specifically to treat social phobic symptoms, so this warrants further investigation. The authors summarise the interrelatedness of pupil, family, and school in the following way:

> Although the family and school are two separate systems, the child serves as a link between the two and, therefore, a problem in one is likely to be felt in the other through the child. For example, family problems are unlikely to be confined to the home, but rather spillover into the school, affecting pupils' ability to concentrate, their grades, and even their relations with their teachers and classmates. The present study ... supports the possibility of such a spillover process. (Corville-Smith et al., 1998: 637-638.)

This information is useful in terms of developing new forms of intervention to counter truancy. The findings from Corville-Smith et al. study suggest that to effectively reverse patterns of school absenteeism, educators and EWOs must have a solid understanding of the stressors that each pupil faces. Once the true motivation for non-attendance has been determined, the problem can be effectively addressed. Given this argument we must assume the solution lies in identifying and treating the cause but as we can see from this study there are often many factors – within the child, the child's family and the school – that are interrelated, and therefore a solution that targets a single area for intervention is unlikely to be effective. Success

is more likely to be achieved if parents, pupils and school staff share in the task of identifying solutions to non-attendance.

A similar study to Corville-Smith et al's. was conducted in the US by Sommer (1985). This author sought to identify the differences and similarities between 25 eighth grade non-attenders and 25 eighth grade attenders who were matched for age, grade, gender, and ethnicity. The pupils were assessed in four areas: family, friendship patterns and interests, behaviours and attitudes toward school, and cognitive factors including academic ability and achievement.

Where Corville-Smith et al. found both school and family factors to be significant predictors of absenteeism, Sommer's study suggests that school factors alone influence a pupil's decision to truant. 'The major differences were in school behaviour, attitudes, academic ability, and achievement' (Sommer, 1985: 411). When asked why they had skipped school, non-attenders most frequently responded with 'boredom' and 'dislike of schools and teachers.' Further, truancy was closely associated with disruptive, antisocial behaviours in the classroom.

For Sommer (1985) these findings suggest that truancy intervention should begin in the school with the development of alternative curricula and programming. In Sommer's estimation, schools should endeavour to improve course content, teaching and school climate before assigning blame to personality characteristics and poor family functioning. However, it should be noted that in this study, personality characteristics were addressed in a fairly superficial manner. For example, although 'dislike of school' is categorised as a school factor, the dislike may stem from social phobia, hyperactivity or any number of other personality characteristics. Because Sommer did not control for these overlapping features and variables, the generalisbility of the study is limited. It could of course be argued that since most students do not truant, it would appear that it is the family side that should be tackled first, rather than change much of the school's operating environment to meet the needs of a few.

Like Corville-Smith et al. (1998) and Sommer (1985), Jenkins (1997) sought to understand the interrelation of personal, family, and school characteristics in the development of school delinquency patterns. However, instead of looking at

personality, family and school as three different 'dimensions' that contribute to non-attendance, Jenkins utilised a single, integrated theory, that of the 'social bond.'

In the social bonding theory, school is seen as a primary mechanism in the socialisation of children. Jenkins (1995) states:

> Through the process of teaching educational skills and social values and providing rewards and punishments, schools are intended to empower children to become responsible, productive adults. Because youths spend much of their time in school, school-aged children's involvement in delinquent behaviour may be affected by their educational experiences. As an instrument of socialisation, then, the school can play a major role in the prevention of delinquency by combating delinquency within the school settings and by strengthening the bond between pupils and the educational process. (Jenkins, 1995: 221.)

There are, however, numerous obstacles to creating a solid social bond with pupils. Jenkins (1995, 1997) postulates that if these obstacles could be accurately identified, the causes of non-attendance and other forms of school delinquency would also be identified. On the basis of previous research, Jenkins hypothesises that these obstacles would include personal characteristics, family involvement with schooling and poor academic ability grouping.

According to Jenkins (1997), the school social bond has four components: attachment (caring about others in school and their opinions and expectations), commitment (valuing educational goals), involvement (participating in school-related activities) and belief (accepting school rules as fair and consistently enforced). Unsatisfying interactions in school are also thought to prevent the formation of a solid social bond.

The goal of Jenkins's 1997 study was to determine the independent effects of the four components of the social bond on three measures of school delinquency: school crime, school misconduct, and school non-attendance. The sample was comprised of 754 pupils in Grades 7 and 8 at a large, urban middle school in America. After gaining permission from parents, the researcher distributed an anonymous questionnaire among the pupils. The self-report data procured via these questionnaires was then augmented with open-ended interviews, informal teacher interviews, behavioural referral records, and school attendance records.

The evidence from this study supports the social bond theory and its general analytic model. Jenkins's data shows that 'personal background characteristics, family involvement in schooling, and ability groups influence the strength of the school social bond, which in turn influences whether pupils pursue delinquency in school' (1997). Other findings (Jenkins, 1997) relevant to the present study included school commitment and school attachment were the strongest predictors of school non-attendance.

Evidence from these findings would suggest that, first, truancy is directly related to the level of school commitment. Second, commitment to school varies. This is perhaps because parents' educational attainment and values vary and therefore the answers are to be found at home. This presumes that parents valuing education will establish an environment in which children are committed and engaged with education. The findings of this study must be interpreted cautiously in view of the inherent limitations of a sample drawn from a single middle school. We cannot assume the relationship between the school social bond and school delinquency observed in this sample can generalise to all school misbehaviour. Indeed, it is probable that the effects of the school social bond vary among schools from primary to secondary school. Furthermore, differences in school size, administrative policies and procedures regarding school discipline, and the type of school community (i.e. urban, suburban or rural), for example, would be expected to affect the impact of the school social bond among different schools.

The social bond theory, as outlined by Jenkins (1995, 1997), offers an elegant, multifactor explanation for school delinquency, including non-attendance. Of course, the question is how far is truancy the cultural norm when influenced by the culture in the school, street culture and school relationships within the peer group? The theory implies that non-attendance must be first seen as an expression of school dislike; personal and family characteristics should be considered as secondary influences. In fact based on this theory, practitioners should be able to 'predict' a level of truancy that can be used as a base line to record measures of performance.

In terms of developing truancy intervention programmes, this means that school factors like expanded curricula should be addressed first. However, this could be seen as the consequence of more fundamental causes. For instance, school could be

considered a factor when large numbers truant, especially if the numbers are far greater than expected. If these efforts fail to draw pupils to school, educators and EWOs should then look for motivations in the personal and family spheres.

Although Jenkins (1997) plays down the significance of personal and family factors, other authors argue that they play a primary role in school non-attendance. For example, Bernstein, et al. (1989) contend that social phobia is an important motivation behind truancy. This psychological condition afflicts pupils and is characterised by bouts of anxiety and, to a lesser extent, depression that result in school-avoidant behaviours. These intense, emotionally negative states, however, are not necessarily related to people or events at school; rather, Bernstein et al. trace them back to family dysfunction. According to these authors, 'dependency and separation problems were among the disturbances in family functioning characteristic of two-thirds of families of children with school phobia, with a tendency for mothers to rate the child as more important than the father' (1989: 24). Thus, it can be seen how school phobia is imparted on the pupil from his or her parents.

In order for the EWO to effectively combat non-attendance, a full understanding of the multiple, and often interrelated, causes is needed. But before discussing how EWOs can put this knowledge to practical use, we will clarify why non-attendance is harmful to the pupil and to society at large. First, the immediate consequences of non-attendance will be outlined, and then a broader theoretical discussion of the truancy problem will be presented.

2.3.2 The Consequences of Non-attendance

In both the scholarly and popular press, literature on the negative consequences of truancy abounds. The most obvious and immediate effect of non-attendance is academic deficits. If pupils are not attending school or missing lessons on a regular basis, it will be very difficult for them to keep up with their peers and perform well in exams and other measures of achievement. It is likely that this will contribute to and may compound their low self-esteem and self-worth and make their overall school experience more uncomfortable (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998; DfES, 2002).

The second significant consequence of non-attendance is dropping out of the education system. Bell et al. (1994) found that truancy is very closely associated with dropping out, and 'the implications of dropping out are serious' (Bell et al., 1994: 205). The US Census Bureau found that in 1988, dropouts were 5 times more likely to be unemployed than those with a diploma. 'Furthermore, a male high school dropout will earn $260,000 less over his lifetime than a high school graduate and contribute $78,000 less in taxes while the figures for females are $200,000 and $60,000, respectively' (Bell et al., 1994: 205-206).

In Britain, similar circumstances exist. In contrast to Bell et al's literature review but reaching similar conclusions, the Social Exclusion Unit conducted personal interviews with young people. The Social Exclusion Unit reported that truancy is associated with a significantly higher likelihood of becoming a teenage parent, being unemployed and homelessness later in life (1998: 1).

Numerous authors associated non-attendance with juvenile and adult deviance including drug and alcohol abuse, criminal behaviour, violence, and vandalism. For example, in Wardhaugh's (1995: 743) opinion after the initial act of not attending school, pupils embark on a career which moves them towards the socially-constructed deviant identity of truant and which ultimately ends in them being out of school and in care. Spencer (1998) reports that absence from school is the most common risk factor among young criminal offenders: 'Almost 95 percent of young men serving time in young-offender institutions have been expelled from school, played truant persistently, or simply left school before the age of 16.' The methodology used in this project consisted of the life histories of 45 inmates from three young-offender institutions being gathered. In this qualitative study the emphasis was placed firmly on interview techniques to explore issues. Absence from school was found to be the highest risk factor among the young offenders.

A report by the Social Exclusion Unit (1998: 1) states that truancy and exclusion have reached a crisis point. 48 per cent of secondary school truants become offenders as opposed to 16 per cent of non-truants (SEU, 1998). The thousands of children who are not in school on most schooldays have become a significant cause of crime. For example, in London, it has been estimated that 5 per cent of all offences are committed by children during school hours. Forty per cent of

robberies, 25 percent of burglaries, 20 percent of thefts, and 20 per cent of criminal damage in 1997 were committed by 10- to 16-year olds (Social Exclusion Unit, 1998: 1).

These reports indicate that school non-attendance has serious, detrimental effects that are costly for the government and for society at large. Crime, unemployment and welfare all drain national resources, but Carlen et al. (1992) indicate that the problem goes deeper than finances. In their qualitative analysis of school non-attendance, Carlen et al. describe truancy as a form of social exclusion (imposed or self-inflicted), which cannot be conceptualised separately from wider forms of class and social stratification experienced by young people and their families (Carlen et al., 1992: 48). This is particularly true in economically depressed areas where there are persistent, high rates of school non-attendance. Carlen et al. suggest that these communities have 'learned' to be failures and, in a perverse way, collude in their own downfall, by reproducing their own inadequacies, bad habits and cultural traits. But this was not supported by the evidence of the Norwest study cited in Carlen et al; this report suggests that far from being self-inflicted, the problems of poverty, illness and neglect are, in the main, politically and economically generated (Carlen et al., 1992: 10).

2.3.3 Perspectives on Non-attendance and the Role of the Education Welfare Service

Most pupils go to school on a regular basis and, thus, are supported by a two-way link between family and education, notably on matters, which relate to learning, behaviour and attendance (DES, 1989a: 25). It is when that link breaks down that 'trouble' arises. According to Carlen et al. (1992: 11), truancy and other forms of school delinquency provide important clues about the problematic relationship between family, education and society. These system breakdowns reveal the chain of relations and reactions involving parents, children and schools, as well as the wider principles of legality, order, power and control in society. For this reason, 'truancy' means more than simply being absent from school; it can be seen as a symptom of other societal problems and tensions. Carlen et al. suggest that truancy

touches on a sensitive and deeply rooted social nerve, which is based in the very history and ethos of compulsory state education.

Virtually all literature on school non-attendance assumes that regular school attendance is evidence of healthy childhood development, and, hence, truancy is seen as pathological. Moreover, most citizens support free education, a system that can only work if school is compulsory. However, pupils, citizens, educators, and lawmakers all have different ideas about how compulsory education should be enforced. This is where the many and diverse theoretical perspectives on truancy arise.

Three major philosophical dilemmas related to truancy are: 1) whether authoritarian forms of discipline should be used to enforce schooling; 2) whether it is ethical to force pupils to go to school when the education systems can be understood as an efficient mechanism for social control; and 3) whether it is ethical to force pupils to go to school when this disciplinary measure is used by politicians as a political stratagem that will gain votes. By looking at these theoretical issues, it becomes clear that there are other goals implicit in compulsory schooling that are not about the child and his or her optimal development.

By voting with their feet (as they are effectively doing through non-attendance), pupils call into question the legitimacy of compulsory schooling. They call into question the state's right to manage the systems of societal production and reproduction, and they call into question the quality of the education they are receiving. Thus, as Carlen et al. describe, the regulatory agencies concerned with getting non-attenders back to school are engaged in a battle on two fronts: on one the physical task is to return the pupil to full-time schooling; on the other, the ideological prerequisite to the physical task is the normalisation of schooling as a supposedly unquestioned good. To this end, the various agencies empowered to enforce school attendance pursue programmes of normalisation that attempt to mould compliance to the myth of universal education by attempting strategies of exclusion from, and inclusion within, schooling (Carlen et al., 1992: 82).

Carlen et al. (1992: 180) conclude that young people will not 'believe' in the benevolent good of compulsory education until the politics become more 'pure'. If

pupils felt that the state was truly working to offer them the best possible education and not simply to control and 'normalise' their behaviours, truancy would likely decrease. Young people would be less cynical about what 'social inclusion' means. For EWOs, these political dilemmas present two practical approaches to the truancy problem. At one end of the spectrum there is the traditional school board approach (insist, law enforcement, authoritarian); on the other end of the spectrum there is the supportive approach (assist, empower parents, empathise, encourage). It is suggested that for the EWO to maintain an effective working practice, it is important to acquire skills and knowledge from both approaches.

Good school attendance is not just about academic achievement; it is also about the concept of social inclusion (Collins, 1998: 3). Access to educational opportunity is important in shaping the lives of young people in our society. It is recognised that good attendance and academic achievement are closely related. As a society we have to acknowledge that for the vast majority of young people, schools, teaching staff and the LEA support services get it right. But, for a minority of young people, for whatever reason, school becomes a place to avoid. It is this minority of the school population from which the EWO draws its client caseload.

Society is made up of a structure of overlapping institutions e.g. family, education and religion. Depending on one's philosophical stance, some of these institutions are thought to be more central than others in that they do the most 'overlapping' e.g. the state is more central to the understanding of schools for it secures their existence by means of compulsory attendance laws. According to Morris (cited in Cosin, 1972: 291), there was a need for new means of enforcing civil discipline. As he puts it:

> State intervention was indeed radical and not collectivist; but its motivation was anxiety to control, to regulate and to promote. In dealing with the social order the parental syndrome was stronger than economic principle.

2.4 The Education Welfare Service: Organisational Initiatives and Structure

The EWS maintains the theoretical position that compulsory school advances social inclusion. For example, in 1968, the Seebohm Committee stated that the goals of

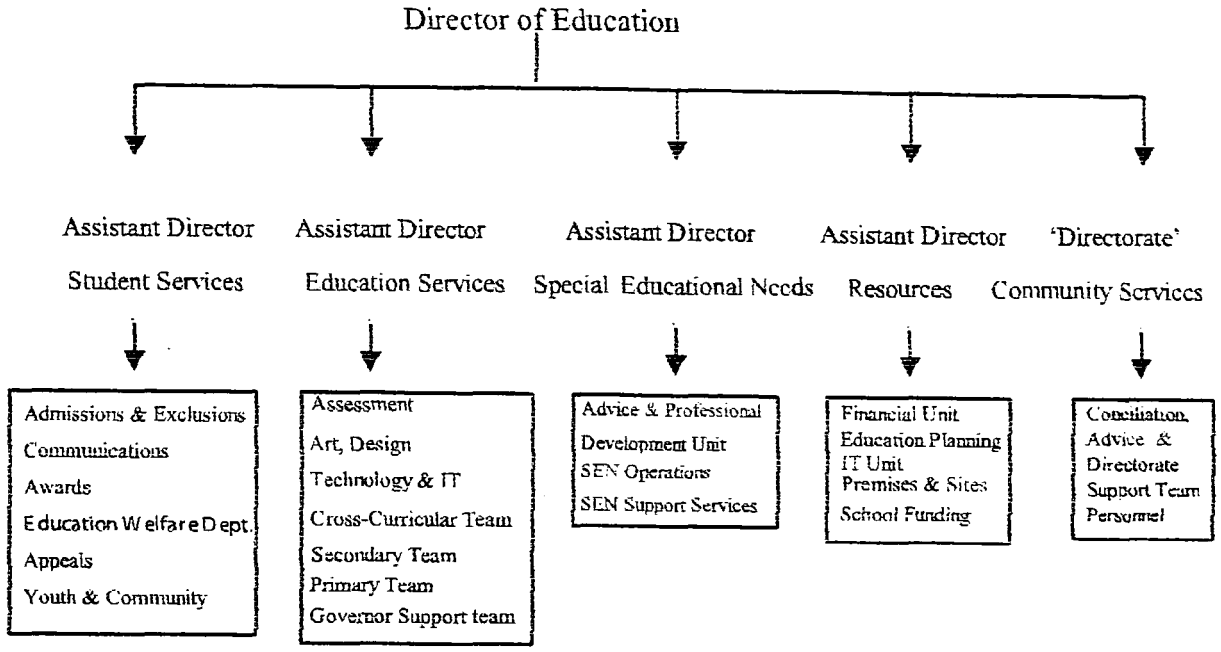
the Education Welfare Service (EWS) were to counter 'the grave handicaps of lack of training, inadequate pay, and status' (Macmillan, 1977: 18). In this section we will explain how the EWS pursues these goals, and how its organisation structure reflects its intents.

2.4.1 The Organisation Basis of the Education Welfare Service

Since 1970, there has been much debate about the organisation and administrative base of the EWS. This has, according to Robinson (1978: 193), brought the service to the attention of social workers and teachers and others. The government at the time distinguished between the statutory duties with regard to school attendance and the allocation of duties to staff such as acting as a mediator between parents and schools, collecting outstanding dinner monies and working closely with families on a one-to-one basis, which are not. Today, in the absence of government directives concerning service organisation, staffing or qualifications, EWSs tend to reflect local needs and local practices (Collins, 1998).

The two associations concerned with the EWS (the National Association of Chief Education Welfare Officers and the National Association of Education Welfare Officers), while stressing the social work nature of their task and their need of training, stated that they would prefer to remain within the education department (figure 2: 52). This is an ongoing bone of contention between NASWE and the government. A report commissioned by the government entitled 'Missing Out' felt that local education authorities could 'have a far greater effect on attendance issues by promoting improvement in schools' management of absence rather than by individual casework' (Audit Commission, 1999: 40).

Figure 2: An example of the Organisational Structure of an Education Department



(Hertfordshire County Council, 2000)

It is apparent then, that some aspects of EWS organisation, such as where the service is sited and the level of resources available to them, will have an impact on how EWOs respond to non-attendance. In an attempt to obtain EWS perspectives on a range of service, staffing and working practice issues, the recent National Foundation for Educational Research study, Atkinson et al. (2000b) reported from their face-to-face interviews that two authorities within the sample 20 LEAs, had recently relocated the EWS within Social Services rather than education and, in one case, this was reported to have resulted in positive benefits to the service without a reduction in the links to education (Atkinson et al, 2000b: 20). It could be argued that the full implications are as yet unclear as to the benefits of siting the EWS within Social Services as too few services have transferred. Additionally, data presented does show that, whilst the sample can be considered representative in terms of type and size of LEA and levels of service resources, the sample was weighted towards authorities with low unauthorised absence figures and medium levels of authorised absence.

However, Atkinson et al. do go on to report that where services were located within the LEA, they tended to be grouped with other LEA services with common aims and this was reported to have aided communication (Atkinson et al., 2000b: 20). This would seem to imply that where the EWS is sited is less important than the

management of communication across organisational boundaries.

2.4.2 Enforcement versus welfare

The Plowden Committee (Central Advisory Council for Education, 1967) recognised the potential contribution of social work in combating underachievement in schools and recommended the establishment of a school social work service to complement the work of teachers. The Seebohm Committee took up the theme of school social work, recommending that social work and education welfare are integrated. The resulting organisation links would provide a better career structure for social workers in that they could more easily move between sub-systems within the system.

Although the Seebohm Report (DHSS, 1968: 70) recommended that the two services be integrated, only a handful of local authorities attempted integration e.g. Somerset and Avon, Haringey. The DES published a Circular in 1986 on the future of the EWS which distanced education welfare work from mainstream social work with children, taking a narrow view of school attendance problems which ignored the potential role of the service in dealing with a wide range of childhood disadvantage (Blyth and Milner, 1998: 35).

Blyth and Milner (1998: 35) refer to this as legislative separatism, which reflects two quite distinct traditions in social work distinguishing children's problems in families from their problems at school. They consider this two-strand development of social work responses to children to be a 'peculiarly British phenomenon'; a large-scale questionnaire survey of European attitudes to the role of the family showed that while other European countries consider bringing up and educating of children to be important, the British see providing love and affection as the most important task for the family (Blyth and Milner, 1998: 35). This is explained by Blyth and Milner as being an important distinction in that it explains why social services' work with children and families has become a mainstream service with education welfare remaining a marginalised and relatively under-developed service.

In 1967, the Plowden Report (p. 345) recommended that EWOs should be able to visit truants selectively, which would enable them to pay more attention to the reasons underlying truancy. Although EWOs lack a structured professional training, Robinson (1978) argues that many of the experienced officers have a good deal of useful pragmatic knowledge about the patterns and process of truancy, particularly in relation to illicit employment, which could be of considerable use to their better-trained colleagues. The author goes on to say:

> Although the attitudes of EWOs towards truancy tend to be authoritarian and paternalistic rather than guided by the more professional social work attitudes of empathy, acceptance and so on, they are not averse to actively encouraging attendance by a child by taking him to school themselves, as do some other social workers. Unfortunately their lack of training and knowledge does make them less discriminating and there are accounts of phobic children being carried into school. (Robinson, 1978: 14.)

2.4.3 Balancing social control and welfare

As has already been implied by Carlen et al. (1992), EWOs are agents of society. While the family is considered by professionals to be the primary socialising agency, the school is considered to be the major secondary agent of socialisation. Socialisation is the development of the person as a social being and participant in society. It is a process in which different social institutions have their part to play; and these institutions may vary as to the importance of their role at different times during the process. EWOs could then be considered as agents of socialisation, even as tertiary agents, where families and schools have failed. Here, although written twenty five years ago the following comment, succinctly summarises the socialisation process 'the patterns of social learning, the acquisition of language and of selfhood, the learning of social roles and moral norms largely take place in the family and perhaps in the neighbourhood' (Robinson, 1978: 13). However, Robinson does go on to say that the process of social learning in the wider world takes place in the school and beyond; and from the societal perspective, socialisation is the medium by which social and cultural continuity are attained. Socialisation, therefore, includes the transmission and maintenance of existing moral norms.

It is the concerns about order and control, proper parenting, the work ethic and crime that Collins (1998: 6) discusses with regard to preventing deviance from societal norms if possible, or adequate control if not. Robinson (1978:14) explains that such norms are constantly redefined and reshaped, and another aspect of the socialisation process is to enable the evaluation and innovation of social norms. It is in this aspect that socialisation agents, such as EWOs, may become responsible for tasks of social control and 'the effectiveness of social control rests on the transmission of moral norms through the socialisation process, on the recruitment and socialisation of (witting or unwitting) control agents and on widespread acceptance of the legitimacy of the norms and sanctions' (Clausen, 1968, as cited in Robinson, 1978: 14). Robinson describes the police as 'witting' agents of social control, whereas teachers and EWOs could sometimes be described as 'unwitting' agents of social control. In some circumstances such agents have legally backed powers, which they are expected to use in order to ensure the maintenance of prevailing mores of society. Moreover, Robinson stresses that EWOs are publicly accountable for the use of such powers. For example, compulsory school attendance is a situation in which teachers and EWOs are acting as agents of social control.

Teachers use the transmission process and EWOs enforce the law regarding school attendance. Robinson (1978) argues that in a society there seems no way of avoiding the use of some of society's agents in roles where tasks of social control are part of their function:

> Whether teachers and social workers [EWOs] should play such a role to the extent they are required to do is a matter for debate, but it does not seem inevitable that society should continue to use them to shoulder the burden of trying to bring up to standard or into line those casualties which are the result of its own failures. (Robinson, 1978: 248.)

However the tension between education as a form of social control and a means of self-advancement and socio-economic mobility still remains. Blyth and Milner (1998: 3) feel that it clearly suits dominant socio-economic groups to hold out the carrot of self-improvement via education and the near-mythical figure of the self-made (wo)man as evidence that the system does reward those who are worthy and

who make sufficient effort and that, conversely, failure to succeed is the result of individual rather than institutionalised shortcomings.

EWOs have a primary duty to enforce attendance (Atkinson et al., 2000: 52). However, the inclusion of 'welfare' in their job title, and the decision in some areas to assume the title of Education Social Work Service, signifies another dimension to their work. The range of interventions possible are wide, but may be divided broadly into 'care' and 'control' functions. In the pursuit of maintaining social order, the EWO is faced with not only defining the problem but also implementing solutions taken from a continuum of care/control interventions. Figure 3 demonstrates that the title of 'Education Welfare Officer' incorporates this continuum (Holmes, 1999). 'Care' may be defined (Carlen et al. 1992: 6) as measures which overtly at least, aim to bring about a change in an individual or family through some type of provision for their material, emotional, psychological or social needs. 'Control' measures are those that attempt to effect change by means of the imposition of limits or controls on behaviour.

FIGURE 3: CONTINUUM OF WORKING PRACTICE

Education (Discipline) **Welfare** (Befriend) **Officer** (Enforce)

Control ⟷ **Care** ⟷ **Coerce**

While this concept of 'care versus control' is useful, Wardhaugh (1990) suggests that we should take note of its inherent contradictions, in that measures of 'care' may be experienced by recipients as controlling, as well as, or instead of, 'caring'. By the same token professionals or clients may perceive 'control' measures as beneficial. One of the key strengths of the EWS is the 'bridging' aspect of the work between home and school. This is vital to any attendance intervention because EWOs are likely to visit the family home and 'are detached from the school and yet familiar with its staff, structures and procedures' (Blyth and Milner, 1999: 168). However, the interface between social work and the education system has traditionally been characterised by competing and contradictory services for children in trouble at home or school. They receive very different sorts of social

work assistance depending upon whether they are referred to a social services department or an education welfare service. So, as it appears society is not clear on the care/control aspects of education therefore it is little wonder that the EWS is confused as to the delivery of tasks.

2.5 Education Welfare Officers

A recent report to the government's Social Exclusion Unit from National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) and UNISON (1998) comments on the role of the Education Welfare Service as a core service. This was a qualitative study using interview techniques. The highly structured questions were put to one hundred young people between the ages of 11-16 years of age. The report findings from the truancy panels held by UNISON/NASWE in 1998 identified the school as being the most commonly reported reason for truancy: 'schools were seen to discourage rather than encourage learning'. The report further points out that as the problem has worsened, policy has moved towards enforcement of attendance. It argues 'it is clear that a more strategic approach and more resources are needed if truancy is to be tackled in a serious and effective way' (UNISON/NASWE, 1998: 6).

The report called for better monitoring of absence and more support for returning truants: 'there is an over-riding need to improve teaching methods, to make learning more participatory, relaxed, fun and innovative'. The fact that the number of truants is rising could suggest that methods of intervention currently used are ineffective and also that the conditions for EWOs have changed i.e. school, pupil and family. The suggestion here is that very little attention is paid to the role of the EWO and goes on to say 'the education welfare service should be developed to intervene before truancy became persistent'. From this report it appears that current ways of working i.e. organisation and operation are less effective at a time of changing conditions for the EWS and schools. Furthermore, authors of this report did not suggest how practitioner effectiveness could be enhanced.

EWOs are concerned with the children who both fail to attain their educational potential and who break down socially. The tasks that they undertake are delegated to them through the systems in which they work. Broadly speaking, socialisation

agents, when acting also as agents of social control, have responsibilities in relation to maintaining the prevailing moral norms as decreed at macro level. According to Reid, (1999) and Carlen et al. (1992) society requires families, schools and social work agencies to perform tasks in relation to the socialisation of schoolchildren. The school system is primarily concerned with the educational needs and the EWS is concerned with ensuring the regular attendance of schoolchildren.

2.5.1 Role dichotomy

Johnson et al. (1980: 134) found it unsurprising that when asking EWOs and others about key elements of the role of an EWO, the response was frequently law enforcement. For many EWOs the performance of welfare duties only comes through experience of cases of truancy and rarely develops alongside the pastoral care of the school. The suggestion is, according to Johnson et al. (1980: 132), that EWOs who are eager to develop their role in the welfare area gain the impression that there are law enforcement duties and 'other' duties that are in competition for resources. The tension between law enforcement duties and welfare responsibilities is perhaps highlighted by these different values which each reflect.

Law enforcement duties are not incompatible with caring for young people. However, as Johnson et al. (1980: 132) point out, the circumstance of the family may be such that the strict enforcement of school attendance laws may be unwarranted pressure on the family, which will have detrimental effects on the child and its education. The school may refer to the EWO a family where a mother who is unable to cope with being alone in the day is keeping a child at home. In this instance, the EWO might try to involve the resources of other welfare agencies such as social services, on behalf of the family rather than blame the mother for not sending her child to school. But on the other hand, there may be pressure on the EWO from the school or from the LEA to stand by the letter of the law and bring a prosecution. Johnson et al. (1980: 136) argue that this kind of ambiguous case is not unusual in the experiences of EWOs.

The EWO's position today is one of great uncertainty despite repeated calls by government reports for greater professional development (London Government Training Board, OFSTED, 1995; DfEE, 1998, DfEE, 1999b). Many local

authorities have in fact reduced their education welfare services, or indeed abolished them altogether (Plowden Report, 1967; Seebohm Report 1968; London Government Training Board, 1974). Furthermore, Part IV of the Children Act 1989, from the professional view of the child but not the parent, effectively decriminalises truancy (Wardhaugh, 1990). Care orders are no longer made on the basis of non-attendance at school, and thus the role of EWOs has changed dramatically. EWOs have lost considerable legal powers, encouraging them for the past ten years to shift from a 'controlling' to a more 'caring' ethos. However, some EWSs have developed other 'controlling' measures to replace their lost legal powers, for example expanding 'truancy patrol and sweeps'.

As EWOs increasingly question the door-knocking approach to 'pure' truancy (Milner, 1982: 16), they look to the school for the cause of the problem. But in rejecting the 'school bobby' image in favour of a 'social work' approach, they often find that individual and family casework with older disaffected pupils, regardless of their individual problems, is ineffective.

2.5.2 Statutory basis and government directives

The lack of both a statutory basis and central government directions concerning the role of the service, other than stressing its role in relation to school attendance, are held by some authors (Macmillan, 1977; Fitzherbert 1973; Robinson, 1978; Blyth & Milner, 1998) to be the major reasons for the wide variation to be found among education welfare services throughout the country. While this can enable LEAs to respond flexibly to local priorities and need, it has been argued that: 'even allowing for local differences, however, the practice of EWSs varies to an unacceptable degree' (DES, 1989b: 30). Robinson (1978) describes the EWS as:

> Old-fashioned and hampered by its clerical responsibilities. The EWS has virtually been ignored and neglected by the employing education system; it has been treated as a Cinderella service by the schools and too often with contempt by other social work agencies. This is a distressing state of affairs when it is considered that the task of the EWS is to provide bridges and links between the schools and families of the schoolchildren they serve. (Robinson, 1978: 165.)

This view is echoed by Blyth & Milner (1998: 37) who also found that the EWS is widely regarded as 'synonymous with school attendance, surveillance and enforcement officers' rather than mediators or pupil advocates. EWOs are more likely to be viewed as 'authoritarian truant catchers than professional peers by both education and social services, the EWS has long struggled to rise above critical perceptions of the 'patchwork service or the 'phantom of the education service it is very difficult to distinguish its outline, structure or purpose' (Macmillan, 1977: 11). Is it a social work service, a welfare service, an advocacy service, an education service – or simply a poor relation of all of these? In 1998 during a personal conversation with the researcher Lyons referred to the service as 'under-resourced, under-staffed and under-qualified', and went on to say EWOs are trapped in the middle of a web of long-standing professional jealousies, tensions and rivalries.

The recurrent call to 'discipline children by ensuring that they are in school and being educated in a way which will fit them to become 'good' citizens has been a constant pressure on the EWS to fulfil a controlling rather than a welfare function. With the revival of 'Truancy Watch' schemes (Blyth & Milner, 1998: 37), the 'softline' social work approach is being abandoned in favour of the 'rottweiler approach to school non-attendance. The officer adopting the social work approach is more likely to subscribe to the socially deprived theory (disadvantaged child) of the school non-attender, while the more traditional EWO is likely to have adopted the deviant theory (central to current government thinking such as young people not going to school moving into criminal activities) in relation to the non-attender. It appears from literature reviewed that a divided culture has developed within the EWS, which, coupled with pressure from legislation to work a particular way, has created a service that in part is disaffected.

2.5.3 Training and Professional Qualifications for EWOs

The professional background of staff, in particular areas of previous employment and any qualifications held, has implications for the EWOs effectiveness (Atkinson, et al., 2000: 33). Reid (1988) highlighted a 'professional dichotomy' within the EWS. It was thought to originate partly from the varied training backgrounds of many EWOs – some were entirely untrained, others partially, whilst the remainder

held full academic qualifications. It appears then, if there is no common training, there will be no common values and furthermore, if there is no training requirement, professional status will not be achieved.

It has been suggested by Collins (1998: 59) that in the absence of any government directives the organisation of the service remained to be determined, as in the past, by local decision, that there is no national standard of provision, and that it is for schools to discover what type and quality of service are available to them locally. Each LEA has its own policy in relation to those employed within the service (OFSTED, 1995: 3), and the majority of EWOs employed have no relevant training in teaching, social work, or other related professions (Halford, 1991; OFSTED, 1995).

Changes in the pattern of recruitment to the EWS have been influential in leading to a shift in values within the service. In 1974, 85 per cent of officers were over 35 years old, and 65 per cent over 45 years old (Johnson et al. 1980: 140). There have been efforts to recruit young graduates, trainee social workers and married women returning to work and their background and experience often contrast with those of ex-servicemen who formerly staffed the service. Johnson et al. (1980: 134) suggested that it would be more probable that these EWOs would be more likely to press for increased training opportunities and for the service to become professional. EWSs in a +number of areas are committed to recruiting trained social workers and to developing the service along the lines of social services teams. Servicemen moving into education welfare following retirement from the services reportedly had little interest in pressing for training, professionalisation or a career structure (Johnson et al. 1980: 133).

The Lincoln Ralphs Report (London Government Training Board, 1974), whilst strongly endorsing a training programme for EWOs along the lines of social workers, acknowledged the distinctive education setting of education welfare tasks. Johnson et al. (1980: 134) based on a review of the literature reported that EWOs who have been seconded for social work training found it difficult to settle back into a traditional team of EWOs, and although they want to perform social work in an education setting, they start to look elsewhere than the EWS to do this work.

More recently, a questionnaire survey (sent to one hundred and seventeen LEAs in England and Wales) conducted by Halford (1994: 60) with regard to training and qualifications of EWOs showed that about a fifth of education welfare staff held a professional social work qualification. This in itself represented a thirty-fold increase compared with qualifications levels recorded by Macmillan (1977: 52), and 40 percent of authorities seconded staff to Diploma in Social Work programmes. However, Halford also found that a fifth of services had no social work qualified staff at all, and very few authorities supported staff in obtaining further (post-qualifying/post-graduate) qualifications. However, by employing some EWOs with a social work qualification, some perhaps with a degree and some with no qualifications at all can only strengthen the divide within working practice delivery and does nothing to bridge it.

Blyth and Milner (1998: 40) explain that possession of a social work qualification is not a national requirement for employment as an EWO, although a small number of LEAs require this for appointment, especially at senior levels, while many others regard it as a desirable qualification. Halford's survey (1994: 60) also revealed that a large number of staff held other qualifications e.g. first and post-graduate degrees, higher diplomas and 6.8 percent held a teaching qualification. Blyth and Milner (1998: 40) argue that, given the poor response of social services social work staff to educational matters, the Diploma in Social Work is not necessarily the most appropriate qualification for EWOs but the lack of any agreed professional qualification means that EWOs are disadvantaged in both intra – and inter – agency work. Furthermore, by remaining a non-professionalised service, it contributes to their continuing marginalisation, preventing their voice being heard in debates about the form of child welfare delivery.

Historically, the EWS has had limited training and resources, and little recognition as a profession. Wardhaugh (1990: 759) observes this and contrasts it with the considerable powers they have to intervene in young people's lives. From its inception over a century ago, the service has engaged in debate about its appropriate role, in particular whether the emphasis should be placed on social work or policing functions. This dichotomy persists today, and both functions – 'caring' and 'controlling' – are displayed to a greater or lesser degree by individual officers, and

by the service as a whole. It has been determined in this section that the EWS has no common training programme and no training requirement that in turn culminates in a lack of professional status. These issues have serious implications for the culture of the service and, to date, little evaluation of mainstream EWO work appears to have taken place. Training, values and professional status will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 4,5,6 and 8.

2.6 Increasing School Attendance

Returning to school after a period of absence is not easy for most children for various reasons, including feeling fearful of comments and reactions of peers and of teachers; the need to re-create old friendships and establish new ones and the need to catch up with work missed.

According to Johnson et al. (1980: 131), the component duties of the EWO have accrued in an ad hoc way, and sometimes in tension with one another. Whilst these component duties may contribute towards the main function, that of promoting regular attendance, there are duties to this function which EWOs are not expected to perform (e.g., educational guidance). The most frequently expressed tension reported by other authors (Lyons, 1973; Carlen et al. 1992; Blyth and Milner, 1999 and Atkinson et al. 2000b) is that between the duty to enforce the law regarding regular school attendance and the requirement to attend to the general welfare of all school pupils.

2.6.1 Effective interventions

Hersov and Berg (1980) discuss an approach adopted by Rhodes Boyson (1974) who was doubtful as to whether responsibility for truancy lies primarily with slack teachers, neglectful parents or subversive administrators. He described his own approach to non-attenders as 'regular if not eternal vigilance'. Staff at his school made frequent spot checks for hidden truancy, with immediate telephone calls to parents – at work if necessary – whenever any unexplained absence was discovered (first day response). According to Hersov & Berg, whether this approach is seen as coercive or caring may depend on one's point of view. The same i.e. coercive or

caring may be said of pupil referral units (PRUs) for disaffected pupils – many of the PRUs cater for truants and school refusers. Hersov & Berg oppose these centres for three reasons:

> 1. The existence of such a unit 'normalises' deviant behaviour in the eyes of pupils, and thus reduces the potential influences of group pressure from the conforming majority;
> 2. It is as unsound educationally to separate problem pupils from their peers as it is to cream off the academic elite into grammar schools;
> 3. The units reduce the commitment of class teachers and subject teachers to handle problems themselves, with consequent reluctance to co-operate in a pupil's return from the unit. (Hersov & Berg, 1980: 164).

The majority of PRUs catering for non-attenders/disaffected pupils appear to operate on relatively unstructured lines. Descriptive accounts are not hard to find but it seems evaluative studies are almost non-existent. Hersov and Berg point out that from their investigation of the topic one consistent trend appears to be that successful return to school is seldom achieved and is more often an ideal than a reality (Hersov and Berg, 1980: 18).

Studies of persistent absence from school reveal a complex inter-relationship between factors in the school, the local community, the family and the child itself (Reid, 1986; Carlen et al., 1992; O'Keeffe & Stoll, 1995; Rutter et al., 1979). Hence, treatment of the individual, alone or with his family has a good prognosis only when the school and community factors appear insignificant as in some cases of school refusal, or their influence can be overcome in the course of treatment. Hersov & Berg (1980: 166) argue that no single approach – counselling, social workers in schools, special units within schools, special centres independent of schools – is likely to succeed unless based on the recognition that a solution to a many-faceted problem will require close co-ordination and co-operation between schools and the various advisory, casework and treatment agencies.

The law enforcement aspect of the role may be seen as reflecting more 'traditional' values associated with education, such as the importance of formal education in the development of a child, respect for authority and the supremacy of the law. Since the implementation of the Children Act 1989, welfare duties concerning

schoolchildren reflect slightly different values, such as the worth of individual in his or her own right, the sanctity of family life and the importance of self-determination.

Despite the combined efforts of parents, schools, the EWS and the government, school non-attendance remains a substantial problem. Henry (2000) reports that eight million school days each year are lost to truancy in the UK. It is estimated by Henry (2000) that one million pupils skip school at least once each year, and of those, many have made truancy a regular activity. Statistics suggest that roughly 15 percent of all school children in the UK 'play truant' (Henry, 2000). The majority of non-attenders do, in fact, turn up at school in morning, but then drift off to other locations (Anonymous, 1998:7). This could suggest that a majority of truants miss school because they dislike lessons (i.e., the curriculum), and not school per se. In recent years the 'delinquency' and the 'personal deficiency' models of truancy have declined in popularity in education literature as attention has shifted to the critical role of the school in combating truancy.

In their study, O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) questioned the assumption that school pupils truant because of a dislike of school. O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) originally began their research with the observation that pupils do not benefit from instruction if they are not in school. They undertook the largest survey so far to review truancy (O'Keeffe and Stoll, 1995). Specifically, they administered questionnaires to 45,000 students (in 150 secondary schools). Of these, 38,000 responded providing data suggesting that a third truanted at least once in the previous six weeks. By focusing on truants' own critical responses to school, and the deficiencies of the school curriculum in catering to a diversity of needs, O'Keeffe and Stoll (1995) believe they avoid the dual dangers of viewing school as wholly unproblematic and children who decide not to attend as socially problematic or personally inadequate. Of course, in some cases, perhaps pupils who are less academic, the curriculum will be a consideration for truancy.

However, data presented should be viewed cautiously given that not all respondents would be inclined to share on a questionnaire the problems experienced in or out of school e.g. friendship problems, bullying, financial hardship, drug/alcohol use/dependency, homelessness, pregnancy, moving into foster care, parents

separating, death of a family member or genuine medical reasons. For some pupils it may simply have been the case of just stating on the questionnaire 'don't like school/teacher/lessons' rather than stating any friendship/family problems.

Nevertheless, findings from the study state the reasons given for truancy are the dislike of some lessons rather than a dislike of school. It is a widespread rejection of particular lessons rather than the curriculum itself. Truancy is viewed as an important indicator of curriculum acceptance or rejection. O'Keeffe and Stoll blamed schools for part of the problem. They do not support the government's preferred model of a truant 'deviant child', 'disadvantaged child', and so forth. O'Keeffe & Stoll (1995: 82) argue that EWOs should 'henceforth be increasingly aware of those influences on attendance and truancy which arise from the interior life of the school rather than from psychological deficits in schoolchildren themselves'. They go on to say that EWOs would be well advised to familiarise themselves with the various strategies for improving attendance, suggesting a three-pronged strategy in addition to a detailed knowledge of curricular matters:

> Improving the quality of lessons.
> Improving the level of vigilance.
> Improving the welcoming aspects of school. (O'Keeffe & Stoll, 1995: 80.)

However, the authors of the study do not suggest how the EWO might acquire this knowledge or go about the improvements; one would assume it would be in an advisory role working with school staff. Critical of what they perceive to be an undue emphasis on issues such as bullying, racism and sexism in both teacher and social work education, O'Keeffe and Stoll are particularly vehement in their condemnation of 'neo-Marxist theory' which supports the notion of children as oppressed victims of exploitative order and which, they caution, although virtually evaporated from teacher training, 'is widely alleged...[to] survive in social work training'. This issue will not be resolved unless the EWS professionalise' itself and takes up a position on theoretical issues.

2.7 Models of intervention for Increasing School Attendance

As EWOs still struggle to reduce the 'mass truancy' that troubles the UK school system, it is clear that new and novel forms of intervention are needed. A variety of

promising strategies have been employed in the UK, Canada, and the US, and they have had been fairly successful at increasing school attendance on a local level. Generally, they fall into one of three categories: 1) interventions oriented toward the individual; 2) interventions oriented toward the family; and 3) interventions oriented toward the school. In this section of the Literature Review, interventions of each variety will be presented.

2.7.1 Intervention Oriented Toward the Individual

In an earlier section of this literature review, some common characteristics among non-attenders were noted. For example, males are more likely than females to truant without parental permission; pupils whose parents have low education levels are truants more often than pupils with well-educated parents; and pupils of low socio-economic status skip school more frequently than middle- to upper-class pupils (Carlen et al. 1992; Bell et al. 1994; Le Riche, 1995 and Reid, 1997). Further, non-attenders often have low self-esteem, poor academic ability and self-concept, and exhibit antisocial behaviour, especially in the classroom (Jenkins, 1997; Corville-Smith et al. 1998).

In their review of literature regarding the psychopathology of truant behaviour, Bell et al. (1994) report on one experimental form of intervention that proved 'in their view' successful: an in-school suspension programme where the intervention included counselling, autobiography-writing therapy, and offering incentives for good attendance. 'This therapeutic approach resulted in more positive attitudes toward school attendance, improved attendance, and greater insight by the pupils into their attendance problems' (Bell et al., 1994: 206). The implication from this study is that it is helpful to combat truancy on a cognitive level, showing the pupil what is wrong with his or her behaviour and why it is counterproductive. With this insight, the individual can better make decisions regarding education.

A second strategy described by Bell et al. (1994) is referred to as 'self-management, and it is based on two underlying premises: 1) if pupils are given specific attendance requirements, they can also be given the responsibility to fulfil these requirements; and 2) because school is of great value to each pupil, the right to

attendance should be earned.' On these grounds, chronic non-attenders at a school offering an alternative curriculum in the US were given specific requirements they had to meet if they wanted to attend school. These included showing up on time and completing homework assignments. If the pupils did not fulfil these requirements, they would not be admitted to school.

Bell et al. (1994) contend that this reverse psychology technique worked for two main reasons. First, pupils were aware of the fact that their futures rested in their education. When threatened with having their educational opportunities taken away, non-attenders began to value school more. Bell et al. hypothesise that the second reason for this intervention's success is the social (and antisocial) nature of adolescence. Pupils are often trying to make a rebellious statement by skipping school; they are asserting their selfhood through this form of misbehaviour. But self-management intervention denies them the social stage for these 'performances.' However, as Bell et al. provide only a review of the literature and did not personally conduct a study trial, substantiation of effectiveness is required by new research. It may not be possible to totally solve the problem of school non-attendance by focusing on only one aspect or target one area because they are all intricately related and connected to one another. It makes sense therefore to utilise an approach that addresses all the aspects of school non-attendance.

Sprague and Walker (2000) also offer recommendations for truancy intervention. These authors emphasise the importance of the early identification of antisocial behaviours and early intervention for non-attendance. If middle school pupils learn that they can 'slip through the cracks' at school, they are more likely to establish a pattern of non-attendance in junior high and high school. This view is corroborated by Jenkins (1997) who stresses the fact that most truants are in 'high school'; therefore, if educators and EWOs can form a solid social bond with pupils in middle school, they can avert long-term patterns of truancy.

Sprague and Walker (2000) conducted first, a retrospective analysis study of adolescents and adults who have committed a serious or violent crimes in attempts to look back in time at behavioural, ecological, and pathological factors that may be correlated with the antisocial behaviour pattern. A second method used a forward-looking analysis, identifying at-risk youth at an early age and following their life

course. It was claimed that both methods yielded consistently defined pathways that progress from early disruptive and temperamental behaviours to chronic patterns of school adjustment problems, delinquency and adult criminality. Sprague and Walker (2000) recommend several specific techniques for early intervention. The first of these is that EWOs and educators must establish close communication, so they can monitor younger pupils who show early signs of antisocial behaviour. Intervene as early as possible, with a comprehensive plan that offers the pupil individualised attention and cognitive training, as well as family therapy. Secondly, they suggest that it is important to assure that the pupil is properly placed in terms of his or her academic ability. If needed, the child's curricula should be supplemented with tutoring or other forms of special education.

Thirdly, both behavioural risks and strengths need addressing. If EWOs and educators are working with pupils who have not yet become chronic non-attenders, they need to be supportive rather than punitive. Sprague and Walker assert 'the primary focus with antisocial pupils in the school setting should be on the simultaneous reduction of behavioural risks (e.g., aggression towards others, victimisation of peers) and development of personal strengths and assets (e.g., empathy, academic competence)'. Finally, Sprague and Walker suggest matching the strength of the intervention to the antisocial behaviour. By this they mean that one-time truants should be handled differently than chronic truants. If an occasional non-attender is treated too harshly, he or she may withdraw further from the school environment. Thus, professionals should have a clear idea of the child's history before implementing an intervention.

Evidence produced from this longitudinal study identified variables and relationships that are key in the development of delinquency and further, in the resolution of non-attendance patterns. This integrated model, though it has rarely been implemented fully in the context of schooling, provides an ideal means for schools to develop, implement and monitor a comprehensive management system that addresses the needs of all students in the school.

Like Sprague and Walker (2000), Sinclair et al. (1998) believe that the earlier the intervention can be implemented, the more effective it will be. These authors implemented an experimental intervention for pupils who were doing poorly in

middle school (ages 9-13 years) and who were thought to have either learning or an emotional/behavioural disability. These pupils were identified as likely candidates for high school non-attendance and, eventually, dropping out.

To help these at-risk youngsters, Sinclair et al. implemented a programme called Check and Connect that was designed to aid these pupils in the transition from middle to high school. The authors explain why the intervention targeted this transition period:

> Considerable evidence suggests that any time of transition may be stressful for youth. The transition from middle to high school may be particularly difficult for pupils with learning or emotional/behavioural disabilities, as indicated by the significant increase in dropout rates among pupils with disabilities in [US] grades 9 and 10. ...Pupils experiencing the transition have to make the usual adaptions to new teachers and classes, as well as to an increased emphasis on academics, where the focus shifts from passing classes to earning academic credits toward graduation. (Sinclair et al., 1998: 4.)

As stated, low ability grouping and low academic achievement are considered primary causes of truancy. Therefore, educators implemented a mechanism for systematically and regularly monitoring observable pupil performance (i.e. Check) and then offered individualised interventions 'in a timely fashion' (i.e. Connect). By so doing, Sinclair et al. were able to increase the 'disabled' pupil's academic competence and social comfort in high school, while simultaneously reducing disruptive and/or antisocial behaviours like school non-attendance. Given this argument that interventions can retain pupils with learning and behavioural challenges in school, we must ask about the grounds for the author's claim these same strategies will equip all pupils with the desired skills and competencies.

2.7.2 Intervention Oriented Toward the Family

According to Sinclair et al. (1998), children who truant 'often face a host of stressors (e.g., poverty, drug and alcohol use, unemployment, conflicts) that produce chaotic family ecologies.' The parents of these children may not have had a favourable school experience themselves, and, thus, they may be resistant to interventions. But 'in spite of these potential barriers, it is imperative that every effort be made to enlist the family as intervention partners so the at-risk child is

exposed to a consistent set of monitoring, expectations, and rules at home' (Sinclair et al., 1998). Family involvement is vital in the resolution of attendance problems. For example, an EWO may work with a young person in school and develop an attendance improvement programme but without the support of the parents in ensuring their child goes to bed at a reasonable hour, completes homework and gets up in time for school, little success will be achieved.

While some interventions will simply require the parents' support, others require that the whole family be actively involved. One innovative form of family therapy 'positive practice' is described by Carr (1997). Positive practice is a 'brief, integrative approach to consultation with families' wherein EWOs or other social service agents meet with the non-attender, his or her parents, and any other individual who plays an important role in the situation. The therapeutic process is divided into a set of distinct steps or phases: planning, assessment, therapy, and disengagement. Carr contends that in order for the therapy to be effective, the participants must complete each step before moving on to the next (i.e., therapy should not begin until a full assessment of the situation has been made). This approach to practice draws on ideas from traditions within family therapy field and evolved from Carr's seven years of action research.

In Carr's 1997 report, the author offers an in-depth example of how positive practice techniques can be used to resolve non-attendance problems. This example illustrates the fact that non-attendance often derives from the family environment, and it cannot be stopped until the 'chaotic' or 'pathological' behaviours at home are addressed. However, because of its emphasis on the socially constructed nature of problem formulations, practitioners working with school non-attenders may find the framework useful as a guide but as a central feature of this approach is to include and explore family dynamics, one disadvantage of adopting this model is that it can be time consuming for the EWO.

The case study described in Carr's report details the successful return to school of a 14 year-old girl who suffered with stomach migraines. The programme consisted of six sessions of family therapy with both parents. Conversely, it would be useful for practitioners who are considering adopting this approach to have more case studies to reflect upon. For example, it would be interesting to hear how or if family

therapy would be successful for a family consisting of a 14 year-old boy or girl refusing to attend school, living with his/her single mother but often staying out all night with their friends.

A second trend in family-based intervention is to link education welfare work with other social services. If a child's misconduct is exacerbated by his or her home life, the problematic elements of home life must be addressed. For example, if a parent has been diagnosed by a professional i.e. general practitioner or psychiatric nurse with a substance abuse problem and is thus unable or unwilling to discipline the child, the EWO can draw other social service agencies into the picture, to address the primary problem - the parent's abuse. Without this type of networking between agencies, of information sharing, effective reduction in truancy may be hindered.

2.7.3 Intervention Oriented Toward the School

The final type of intervention is a school-based programme that attempts to reduce non-attendance by diversifying curricula, improving academic ability groups, and strengthening the social bond between pupils and educators. Klein (1998) observed one such programme over a five-year period, implemented at an alternative high school in the US. The high school is a 'magnet' school for pupils who have had disciplinary or social maladjustment problems elsewhere. Educators there are employed first and foremost for their interpersonal skills. Academics are seen as important, but 'the aims of the school place equal stress on the improvement of pupils' academic performance and their self-image' (Klein, 1998).

The school has three practical methods for achieving this end. First, the school holds small 'Focus Groups' each day, so teachers can check in with pupils about problems at school, at home, or elsewhere. Second, teachers 'pledge a commitment to solve all problems rather than refer them to the principal or ignoring them' (Klein, 1998). And third, in their final year, pupils are required to do a minimum of 100 hours of community service. This offers pupils a broader perspective on the world that makes acting-out behaviours like skipping school seem unimportant and pointless. However, although it would be unnecessary to fully implement this programme in a mainstream secondary school i.e. the 100 hours of community service, it would be constructive to improving attendance to implement the focus

groups led by the form tutor or the EWO or the an attendance project worker. Furthermore, whilst the idea of a teacher pledging to solve all problems is excellent in reality it may prove problematic in a mainstream school. Firstly, it is time consuming and secondly, not all teachers have the necessary interpersonal skills to undertake such a task.

In a study of twenty mainstream English secondary schools, Collins (1998) reviewed through interviewing staff the way they dealt with truancy. The schools involved were selected so that the twenty included examples of the major types of school, grant maintained, LEA maintained, selective and non-selective entry, mixed and single sex schools, with as wide a variation in location and size as possible. As a group they experienced levels of absence that was 34 per cent higher than the average for all English schools. Collins argues that the intake to a school may have as much to do with its truancy rates as its management, ethos or curriculum (Collins, 1998: 1).

Whilst other researchers have focused on variables such as gender, age, race and socio-economic status of non-attenders, Collins concentrated on the whole school approach to non-attendance. Three main themes were identified from the findings. In Collin's view it is important to develop: 1) school communication with parents and others over attendance matters; 2) methods used by school to motivate pupils to attend; and 3) a typology of school approaches to unauthorised absence (Collins, 1998: 92). Collins (1998) indicates as a common element the development and application of an attendance policy, which could prepare the ground for more collaborative relationships with all parents (Collins, 1998: 174).

According to Collins (1998), this model of practice, though not fully operational in many schools, provides an ideal framework for EWOs to address all the cases of non-attendance – from the pupil who is absent on odd days 'the nine-day fortnighters' to the pupil who is completely out of school. Because of its emphasis on the whole school community and the choice of usefulness as a criterion for selecting between different formulations to address the same problem, this approach to non-attendance will be implemented and reported upon during the action research stage of this study.

2.8 Summary

The EWS plays a key role in preventing and combating truancy and school absenteeism. What we have seen from the evidence presented in this chapter is that an investigation of school non-attendance often presents the EWO with a set of complex, often inter-related, problems that need to be unravelled and addressed before the presenting problem of non-attendance can be resolved.

The precise role practised by EWOs tends to differ by LEA and by the school for whom they are responsible. There is no national charter on the role and contractual terms and conditions of service of the EWS. It appears from literature reviewed that local education authorities have no legal obligation to provide an education welfare system nor to employ EWOs. Consequently, the service has no inherent statutory remit. Generally speaking, it has been found (Reid, 1999) that EWSs tend to reflect local needs and local practices.

The EWO has a very specific role in supporting a school to maintain high levels of attendance (Reid, 1999: 6). Truancy is an on-going issue, and strategies to date have not been especially effective (Reid, 1999: 6). The focus of intervention for the EWO differs, of necessity, from pupil to pupil. New strategies are needed to increase the effectiveness of the EWS and to enhance the professional status of the EWO. Of course, EWOs are in a position to propose operational solutions but the dichotomy within the profession prevents submission of a whole service proposal. By enhancing working practice we can then address the bigger issue of professionalism. We need to find out how the EWS works so that we can improve its organisation and performance.

Historically the EWS has had limited training and resources, and little recognition as a profession; this contrasts with the considerable powers they have to intervene in young people's lives. From its inception over a century ago, the service has engaged in debate about its appropriate role, in particular whether the emphasis should be placed on social work or policing functions. As we have seen this continues to persist today, and both functions – 'caring' and 'controlling' – are displayed to a greater or lesser degree by individual officers, and by the service as a whole.

Consideration has been given to the philosophical dilemmas related to truancy, which in turn present EWOs with two practical approaches to tackle the problem. First, the traditional law enforcer approach and second the humanitarian 'supportive' approach. Conceptually and practically this appears to be an interesting but contradictory experience for EWOs. On one hand they are the ones who are expected, as law enforcers, to apply the rules of the Education Acts but on the other hand there is an expectation for EWOs to adopt a preventive social stance.

With regard to the role of the EWO two broad themes emerge from the literature: the EWO as a mediator, negotiator and support worker (Atkinson et. 2000b; Reid, 1999; Carlen et al. 1992) and the EWO as an agent of social control (Atkinson et. 2000b; Reid, 1999; Carlen et al. 1992). Reports by Education Welfare Officers suggest that producing the desired social change is quite difficult; more alternative educational resources available to schools and a more appropriately trained EWS are what are needed (Atkinson, et al., 2000b), but failing that, disciplinarian measures are used to enforce attendance (Carlen et al. 1992). It can be strongly argued, however, that 'policing' pupils will not produce a long-lasting social bond with educators and society in general.

This chapter has identified a number of recurring themes e.g., characterising various contradictions in the continuum between care and control, inclusion and exclusion, education and schooling. One such contradiction is the unintended consequence of care and welfare provision in actually reinforcing school attendance and in some cases, prosecuting parents. Another is the way school and community life reflect upon a pupil's school attendance highlighting inequalities. Thus, a feature of truancy as a form of social exclusion is that it is not only linked with school but with the community area involving an intricate balance between family, labour market, housing, health, recreational, leisure and other factors.

Earlier in this chapter studies were discussed that had investigated the causes and consequences of non-attendance. In particular, Corville-Smith et al. (1988) determined how the three domains, personal, family and school overlapped and interacted. On the other hand, Sommer (1985) suggests that school factors alone influence a pupil's decision to absent themselves from school. Jenkins (1997) took this a step further and utilised the theory of 'social bond'. He considered school to

be a primary mechanism in the socialisation of children and that unsatisfying interactions in school are thought to prevent the formation of a social bond. Jenkins (1997) hypothesised that if obstacles to creating a social bond could be accurately identified the causes of non-attendance would also be identified.

The relationship between the findings of truancy research and education welfare practice has been highlighted in this literature review. What has become apparent is that little evaluation of mainstream EWO work appears to take place. Consequently, little exists in the public domain, the work of Atkinson et al. (2000a and b) being the exception. While there is now a plethora of research on the reasons why pupils truant, there is less constructive evidence based on the successful evaluation of existing interventions to demonstrate what works in combating truancy. This chapter has raised a number of questions.

There is sufficient evidence from literature reviewed to indicate that the question of practitioner effectiveness has not been fully investigated. Specific issues to examine are how successful is the EWO in returning a non-attender back to school? What does the daily duties of an EWO actually consist of? Is there an alternative model of operation? In an attempt to answer these questions the strategy of this study has been to: a) identify operational issues using interviews in four local authorities and b) development of procedure and evaluation of EWS effectiveness in one school using the action research method. Overall, the implications for practice confirm the importance for further research efforts in this area. Through research we may begin the process of developing common skills to our work which will lead us down the path to professionalisation.

The following chapter will outline the choice of research methodology and techniques employed for the collection of data.

Chapter Three: Techniques and procedures employed for data collection

3.1 Introduction

The research documented in this study set out to examine the working practice of EWOs engaged to improve school attendance. The methodology employed to do this comprised of a postal questionnaire, 16 in-depth interviews over a six-month period and a two-year action research investigation in one 'failing' secondary school. Table 1 provides a chronology of the research strategy and programme. The intention has been not only to make substantial improvement in the working relationship between the client and practitioner, but also to develop some insights or learning which will be of use in future situations involving, perhaps, other professionals in similar situations elsewhere.

Table 1: Chronology of research strategy and programme.

Date	Action
November 1997	Distribution of provisional proposals to LEAs. Meeting with Heads of EWS at Learning Agency, London
Jan- March 1998	Develop questionnaires and diary/log sheets
March 1998	Pilot questionnaire – make adjustments
July/August 1998	Collection and analysis of data from questionnaires
September 1998	Contacting volunteer EWOs – distribution of diary/log sheets
Sept-March 1999	Continuous monitoring of diary keepers, also in-depth interviews with respondents. 2 days per week.
Sept. 98-Sept. 2000	Action research in secondary school. 3 days per week.
April-May 1999	Analysing data from interviews and observations.
Oct.-Dec. 2000	Analysing data from action research.

The core responsibilities and duties of the EWO have continued to be central to the policy of combating school non-attendance (Ofsted, 1993, 1995: 1; Whitney, 1994: 7). What we do know about truancy and school absenteeism is they are complex multi-dimensional problems; what we do not know is how to implement nationally agreed strategies and interventions for EWOs to effectively re-integrate these young people back into education. In a recent study (Pritchard et al., 1998), the most important finding in relation to the effectiveness of the EWO was the central importance of the pupil's relationship with their EWO, and the practical help and guidance received, indicating the potential of the EWO in combating truancy. However, in recent years, the service has suffered from the 'Cinderella' syndrome in that it is considered not only by practitioners themselves but also researchers such as Robinson (1978), Reid (1999), Carlen et al. (1992) and Whitney (1994) to be the least paid and least qualified of all the professional agencies; additionally, it has been criticised for developing and operating in an ad hoc fashion (Robinson, 1978 and Whitney, 1994).

In practice, this means that EWOs are involved in a wide range of work with children and young people and their families and there is a tendency for their working practice style to be located within one of two models; the traditional school board (insist, law enforcers, authoritarian) approach at one end of the continuum and the supportive (assist, empower parents, empathise, encourage) at the other end. Some EWOs, perhaps through lack of training or skills, work with cases that remain open for indefinite periods and the child remains out of the education system - the case closes when the child reaches the official school leaving age, which has no benefit to the child or the officer. As previously stated in section 1.1, it is the premise of this thesis that, for the EWO to be effective, it is important to acquire skills and knowledge from both approaches with an aim to return the non-attender to full-time education within a minimum of 12 weeks or a maximum of 24 weeks.

3.2 Aims of research

The education welfare officer (EWO) has a very specific role in supporting a school to maintain high levels of attendance but these figures indicate there is clearly a need to examine ways in which different Education Welfare Services (EWSs) and their officers tackle school non-attendance. As there are currently no national guidelines as to how

this group of professionals should operate, this project has been specifically designed to:

Find ways to improve the educational opportunities of school non-attenders working with the EWO by investigating the contribution made by various EWOs in reducing truancy and identifying the range of effective interventions undertaken.

To address the issue of variation of the working practice and training of EWOs. Currently, this depends on the individual local education authority's values and resources, a further aim of this study is to make specific recommendations which may contribute to the development of national guidelines for standardised practice. Evaluating examples of effective practice and facilitating the dissemination of good practice will achieve this.

3.3 Methodology employed

Approaches to addressing issues in non-attendance generate a particular way of data collection. The aim has been to establish a clear link between the problem and the appropriate method of investigation. The problem is to establish the concept of effective practice of the professional working with the school non-attender with a view to developing national standardised practice guidelines. How can the EWO effectively maximise school attendance rates for the individual child, individual school and individual LEA?

As illustrated in Figure 4 (page 81), the research process used in this study consists of seven stages; problem, hypothesis, research design, measurement, data collection, data analysis and generalisation. This process has been adapted from Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias' (1996) model who assert that it usually starts with a problem and ends with a tentative empirical generalisation. The generalisation ending one cycle is the beginning of the next cycle (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996: 20; see figure 4). The most characteristic feature of the process is its cyclic nature.

It could be argued that the research question should determine the approach and techniques and could therefore significantly affect the answers. However it is equally

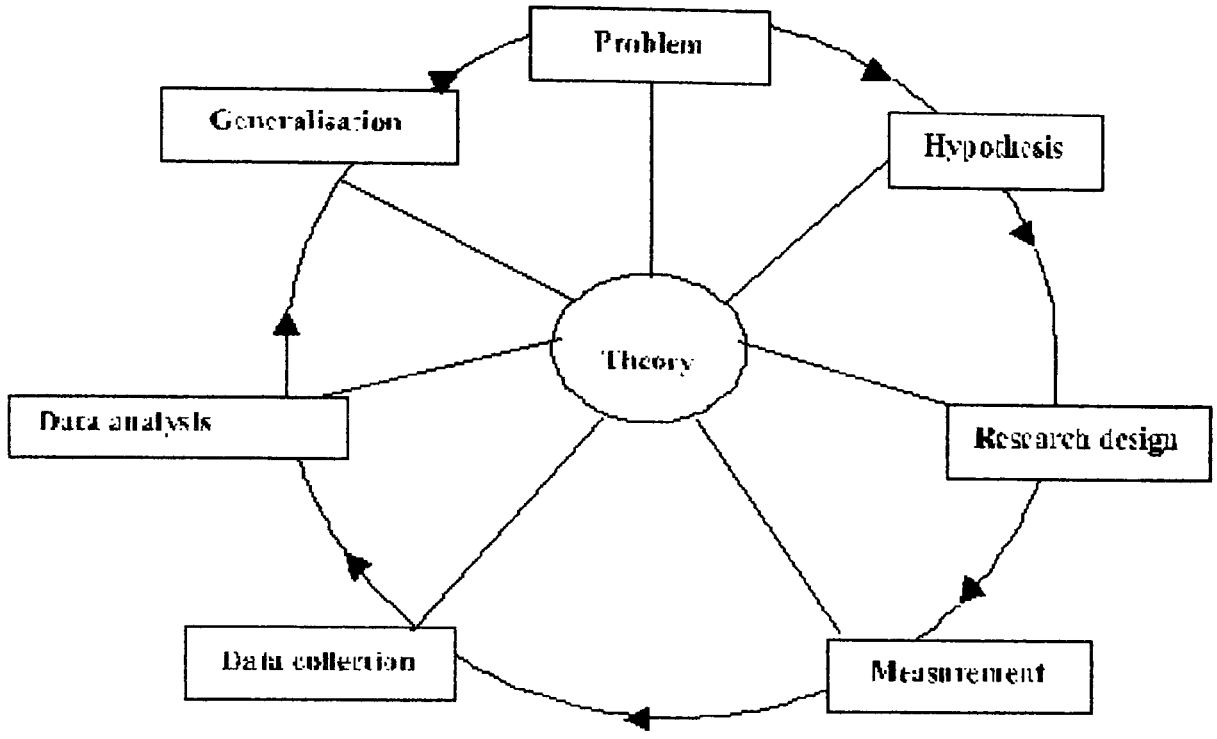
arguable that the results can be influenced by a) the choice of the subjects or b) the objects of the research, in this case people. The strategy seeks to minimise erroneous findings by the method of data collection used. This project employs a combination of qualitative methods with an emphasis on case study and action research to address this issue.

Part of the actual research has been to determine the appropriate data to collect and the means of doing so which has been the main purpose of the first stage of the investigation. Both the data and the means of collecting it have changed as the research has progressed and the context has been better understood. The unit of analysis is the working practice of the EWO. In addition, the subunits of geographical regions, organisational structure and other public agencies are to be examined in detail. As a result, the study incorporates both macro and micro analyses.

The term qualitative research means any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification (Blaxter et al., 1996). However, that is not to say that some of the data in this study may be quantified, as with the questionnaire data but the analysis itself is a qualitative one. This study is certainly comprehensive in its use of techniques and, with its focus on collecting and analysing non-numeric data, has a distinctive qualitative approach. The aims of the research were to consider factors leading to consistent working practice through analysis of data collected, linking individual casework to effective policy and strategy.

The aim of qualitative research is to give an 'honest' account with little or no interpretation of those spoken words or of the observations made by the researcher. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1990: 21) assert that the philosophical principle underlying this approach is that by presenting this 'faithful' account, the researcher's biases and presence will not intrude upon the data. However, although this principle was strictly adhered to during the data collection phase, it should be noted that once coding began so did the process of interpretation.

Figure 4: The main stages of the research process



(Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias, 1996: 20)

The personal involvement of the researcher of this project as a practitioner-researcher was one of the first issues to be addressed and required continued acknowledgement throughout the period of study. For example, particular care was taken when interviewing EWOs to maintain the interviewer/interviewee relationship rather than allow it to develop into a chat between two equals from the same profession. Early in the study consideration was given to the concern that as a practising EWO there was the capacity for subjectivity, however following the lead of Blaxter et al. (1996) and Cohen and Manion (1994), every effort was made to observe and record in as objective a way as possible. A further ongoing consideration was given to ethical matters and issues of sensitivity. The problem of conducting 'inside research' and having access to records and documents was addressed by ensuring that the research was conducted within clear ethical standards and principles as listed below:

The investigation shall be considered from the standpoint of all participants.

To consider the rights and dignity of respondents of the research.

To inform all participants of the objectives of the investigation.

To obtain consent from heads of departments and from parent/guardians of respondents under the age of 16.

Respondents to the study can expect that the information they provide will be treated confidentially and, if published will not be identifiable as theirs.

> To create climates of trust and respect within the recognised code of practice applicable to EWOs.
>
> (American Psychological Association, 1982.)

The attraction of using a qualitative methodology was that it would allow the use of a wide range of methods for handling data that is relatively unstructured and considered not appropriate to reduce to numbers. The statistics available look at the consequence of process, not the process itself. The main aim of the study has been to gain a new understanding of the process applied to the EWO working with the school non-attender by learning from the detailed accounts that respondents give in their own words and from field notes taken during observations and action research. Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities – that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception (Merriam, 1988: 17). Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasises processes rather than ends.

The research programme was designed with a brief to look at practices, especially innovative practices, in the area of non-attendance and raising school attendance figures. But, before moving on to describe the sampling frame it is important to outline the sources of data for each research section. Sampling and selection of respondents included managers and EWOs. The review of EWO working practice included EWOs, school, clients, available statistics and other supporting agencies. The sources of data collection for the effective organisation of Education Welfare Service included managers, EWOs, schools and other supporting agencies.

3.4 Sampling and selection

Once researchers have defined the population, it is usual to draw a sample that adequately represents that population. The population of interest in this study is all EWOs working in England and, as Bell (1999: 83) points out, all researchers are dependent on the goodwill and availability of subjects, and it is difficult for an individual researcher working on a small-scale project to achieve a true sample selection. The actual procedures involve selecting a sample from a sampling frame comprised of a complete listing of sampling units (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1997: 183). However, it was not possible to sample on a national scale, therefore for

the purpose of convenience, the sampling frame was restricted to a local cluster allowing for easy access but was split on two levels. The first level was the local authorities and secondly the Education Welfare Officers (EWOs). A purposive sample was drawn from the total population of those EWSs available and willing to participate. It could of course be argued that data collected in this way may not be representative of the total population under study but the researcher is confident that the sample groups from which data has been collected are indicative of the total EWO population. Local authorities are drawn from different geographical areas (appendix C: 264) and respondents are from both education welfare and education social work backgrounds.

Six LEAS were approached requesting permission to carry out the investigation. These were chosen for their proximity to the researcher's base and for their geographical representation of LEAs in the South East of England i.e. inner London, outer London and the counties. Five agreed to participate but one LEA later dropped out due to staff shortage. It should be noted here that the researcher is employed by one authority and has been employed in the past by another participating in the study. Of course there is a risk of bias and it could be suggested that the research design has no means of assessing the bias. However, to reduce the risk the researcher was aware 'that there may be inherent variation in population of interest' (Greenfield, 1996: 131) and an attempt was made to control this by using 'subjective judgement to select a sample' (Greenfield, 1996: 131) which was believed to construct a sampling frame typical of EWSs that can be found in the UK.

3.5 Questionnaire Design

One of the aims of the research was to find ways to improve the educational opportunities of school non-attenders therefore, with this in mind, the questionnaire was designed to consider factors not previously investigated i.e. specific issues related to effective practice. Data gathered from this phase of the study would contribute to a further aim of the study, which was to evaluate examples of effective working practice thereby allowing the development of a model of the daily duties and interventions performed by EWOs.

In order to assess the design and structuring of the questionnaire, eight EWOs from an outer London authority were interviewed at the area office. These were semi-structured interviews lasting from one and half-hours to ten minutes with eight open-ended questions asked of the interviewees. The interviewee determined the length of the interview. This principle would be applied throughout the study thus culminating in a report to practitioners 'in a language that does not alienate them and prevent them from engaging in a dialogue with the text' (Burgess & Ruddick, 1993: 12). Data from these interviews gave the researcher the opportunity to identify important areas to be addressed in the questionnaire and also to avoid unnecessary questions. The interviews also gave the researcher the possibility to 'capture during the interview, the meanings of practice in the everyday language of the practitioners' (Burgess & Ruddick, 1993: 13). The researcher was well aware of the sensitivity of asking staff to divulge information which could be seen as disclosing confidentialities and personal grievances about their particular education welfare service.

A postal questionnaire designed for self-completion was devised. This was accompanied by a covering letter describing the purpose of the research and assuring recipients of confidentiality. Guided by Cohen and Manion (1994: 96) who suggest that the appearance of the questionnaire is vitally important, the layout was clear, attractive and user-friendly to persuade respondents to consider and complete each question. Frankfort-Nachmias &Nachmias (1996) advise against the use of unusual colour paper but it was agreed that by printing the questionnaire on yellow paper it would stand out from other paper work and not remain on desks or in trays but completed and returned for analysis. The overall appearance of the questionnaire was designed with a view to encouraging participants to complete it rather than start and not finish and/or, worse, put it in the bin.

According to Greenfield (1996: 122) a pilot would enable the researcher to feel confident that the main area of enquiry is being addressed through the development of instruments and procedures, which in turn allow specific checks on reliability and validity. Furthermore it permits a rehearsal of instruments and procedures, where the aim is to fine-tune a design before the final draft. The questionnaire was piloted in March 1998 and raised two very important points. First, when asking questions about interventions and duties, offer a choice of how often they were used, that is frequently,

occasionally or never. The pilot highlighted the fact that some practitioners used them frequently while some, occasionally. Secondly, stipulate a closing date for the questionnaire to be returned. All respondents of the pilot had to be reminded to return the completed form.

3.5.1 Distribution of Questionnaire

The questionnaire was then redrafted (appendix B: 256-263) and finally distributed to the EWOs in May 1998, after the school half term break. It was felt that by distributing after a school break the respondents might feel less stressed and more inclined to participate in the study. A total of ninety self-completion questionnaires were sent to EWOs in six different local education authorities. They was posted using first-class postage and enclosing a first-class stamped envelope for each respondent's reply. The envelopes were of 'good quality, typed and addressed to a named person' as suggested by Cohen & Manion (1994: 97); they were also coded to enable the researcher to record the number of responses received from each LEA.

There is no such thing as an ideal questionnaire, however the researcher took care to adhere to basic guidelines, as set out in Blaxter et al. (1997: 162), regarding layout and question wording. For example, keeping the wording simple and jargon free, natural sequencing of questions, clear instructions, avoidance of hypothetical questions and not asking too many open-ended questions. In designing the layout the researcher drew on her experience as an EWO to ensure phrasing of the questions was easily comprehensible without being patronising in tone. A direct reference was made at the start of the questionnaire to the confidentiality of respondent's answers and the researcher's contact details were given.

The advantages of using a postal questionnaire compared to telephone/personal interviews include low cost, greater anonymity and reduction in biasing error that might result from the personal characteristics of interviewers and variability in their skills. Alternatively, it could be argued that a disadvantage of postal surveys is that they are likely to have a lower response rate and possibly poorer answers because the respondent has no one available to answer any queries; however they do allow a larger number of people to be surveyed, at minimal cost (Blaxter et al., 1997: 160). However,

in order to address this, a follow up telephone call to each of the participating authorities was conducted in order to remind respondents of the return date for completed questionnaires. It is acknowledged by the researcher that one of the disadvantages of using the questionnaire as a data gathering method is that there is no way of correcting misunderstandings or getting at the precise meaning of a response.

3.5.2 Structure of Questions

There were 26 open and closed questions. Appendix B gives an example of each question. The first four questions requested factual information on the professional title, length of employment and qualifications of the respondents. Question 5 asked how the respondent perceived the role of the EWO and questions 6 and 7 asked for details of previous work experience and if they were able to transfer skills acquired from previous career to the present. The next six questions concentrated on training received during induction period and asked for areas to be highlighted that would benefit from specialised training programmes.

The subsequent four questions focused on the number of schools covered and the number of cases each EWO held, as well as presenting a tick list of interventions (taken from the pilot interview data) which required respondents to indicate the ones used in their daily practice when working with school non-attenders. Questions 20 required details of regular supervision from team managers, and questions 21 and 22 enquired as to the number of cases respondents had referred to the magistrate's court for prosecution or for the direction of education supervision orders.

In order to assess factors that may contribute to a model of good practice, questions 23 and 24 dealt with the respondent's perception of what they considered to be important aspects of their work as well as areas needing review and development. Furthermore, data provided also noted any specialist client focus, interventions used and examples of good practice such as instances of group work, training sessions given to school staff, workshops and the development of strategies and systems to combat non-attendance. The final question, phrased as non-directionally as possible, asked respondents if they would be prepared to take part further in the study over a maximum six-month period. It was planned to focus the analysis of the questionnaires on four variables:

professional title of officer, qualifications, training received and range of interventions used.

3.5.3 Processing Questionnaire Data

As suggested by Cohen and Manion (1994: 102), from a random sample of questionnaires a frequency tally of the range of responses was generated as a preliminary to coding classification. This done, responses from all returned questionnaires were then coded and recorded. Data collected from the questionnaires determined the categorisation of the responsibilities of the EWO. A quantitative form of analysis was used that allowed information to be represented as numbers. It also allowed for the training given during the induction period to be examined and to look at the resources available in to the officer in different LEAs i.e. alternative provisions of education for the non-attender. Additionally from this data the researcher was able to establish and monitor strategies implemented by the officer as well as enlisting the support of volunteers for the next stage of the study. This approach provided a quantitative aspect to complement the largely qualitative perspective assumed in this study.

3.6 Case Studies

The aims at this stage of the study were, in particular to obtain EWS staff perspectives on a range of service, staffing and working practice issues and their implications for effectiveness in improving attendance. The intention was to collect more detailed accounts of the initiatives identified in the questionnaires and, more specifically, operational-level staff views on their impact and effectiveness. The measurement used to establish EWO effectiveness was for the non-attender to return to school within twelve weeks of the referral date.

Increasingly, educational research has become interested in attempts that seek to relate educational policy or educational action to its effects. This is particularly true in this study. In the second section it was the intention to disentangle the problem of ineffective working practices through the analysis of data collected and effectively link policy and practice. The EWS objectives are necessarily related to truancy in particular, and juvenile delinquency in general. To this end, educators have offered a variety of

theoretical explanations, others taking a more empirical approach (Bernard, 1990). But one recent development from delinquency research may have significant implications for the study's approach to understanding truancy.

The impact of social constructionist theory on sociological research is reflected in offering a more potent voice to research subjects by asking, for example, delinquents themselves about the sources of their 'anti-social behaviours', permitting them to share in the role of criminologist. Agnew (1990) improved upon this 'first-person account' approach by asking adolescents to explain their own deviant behaviour via the open-ended question: 'What led you to do _____?' In this way, different delinquencies receive different explanations. Thus, the study was designed to utilise Agnew's (1990) research methods. Respondents in this study were asked to give their own first-hand explanations for truancy and recommended interventions to reduce this. For example, EWOs, educators, researchers, and authors were asked to describe their impressions of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of current organisational practices to reduce truancy, with an eye toward remedying deficiencies in the education system.

The case study approach is not restricted to using one mode of data collection and has been described as 'an umbrella term for a family of research methods having in common the decision to focus on an enquiry around an instance' (Adelman et al. 1977, quoted in Bell, 1999: 8). For the purposes of this strand of research a case study approach was used focusing on four particular LEAs to give a more balanced report on the working practices of the EWO. This, according to Cosley and Lury (1987: 65) uses a mixture of methods; personal observation, which for some periods or events may develop into participation; the use of informants for current and historical data; straightforward interviewing; and the tracing and study of relevant documents and records from local and central government.

3.6.1 Avoiding Bias

Generalisations, Laurence Stenhouse (Burgess & Ruddick, 1993:13) argued, can alert practitioners to trends and help them identify variables that seem to be significantly affecting practice in the generality of their area but case study data, set alongside other data could expose and help practitioners to explore some of the interesting differences

that generalisations disguise. In essence, the challenge of this strand of the study was to get an extended range of different settings and different problems. Adopting the case study approach allowed information to be obtained from a representative number of respondents and therefore present the findings as being characteristic of the EWS population as a whole. The advantage is that it allowed the identification of the interaction of factors and processes at work that would not otherwise be identified in a large-scale survey (Bell, 1999: 8). However, in order to avoid bias that may have taken place in over-reliance on one method, multiple methods (Blaxter et al. 1996: 77) within the case studies were used which will be detailed later in this chapter.

3.6.2 Interviews

Data has been collected on the working practices of 16 EWOs from four LEAs working with school non-attenders. The rationale for selection of these LEAs is that collectively they will reflect a range of variables including geographical locale (see appendix C), class and type of client group, resources available and focus of EWOs practice. Case study material selected by the EWO providing 'real life' evidence of work areas was requested from each of the subject's current caseload with a school attendance rate of 50% or below. The type and severity of non-attendance, which the sample exhibited, was broad ranging. There were examples of long-term school refusers, school phobic, blanket and post-registration truants. As such, the sample can claim at least to reflect a genuine voice of the school non-attender.

The EWOs were requested to provide four cases to be monitored over a six-month period with each EWO being interviewed individually for about 30 minutes on three separate occasions by the researcher about the cases. All the interviews were conducted at the interviewee's area headquarters during the working day, and with strong assurances of the right to confidentiality and anonymity. In some of these instances, EWOs were clearly unable to talk of their grievances regarding the service and training. However, the structure of the interview was intended to ensure that EWOs felt comfortable in disclosing facts and outcomes of particular cases. The researcher took notes during the interviews and in some cases the interviews were taped, with the interviewee's permission.

3.6.3 Techniques employed for interviews

This phase of the study included observations of the strategies in action and models of service delivery. In fact, a variety of research techniques was used in order to adequately investigate all aspects of interest. For example, informal interviewing, group interviewing, diary/log sheets, case monitoring, non-participant observation and mentoring EWOs were all used. Issues were explored in depth through interviews with EWOs and other professionals who played a key role in provision of service.

When interviewing respondents the researcher was conscious that many factors influence responses one way or another, therefore particular care was taken in the delivery of questions. For instance, if the purpose of the interview is to extract evidence from participants, it could be argued that all that is necessary is to get the participant to talk. However, Laurence Stenhouse asserts that in most interview situations the interviewer and the circumstances limit the amount of talk therefore the task of the interviewer is to get the richest evidence within the limits of time available (Burgess & Ruddick, 1993: 90). In all the interviewing situations the researcher was explicit about timing informing the interviewee of the length of the interview. Topics for consideration included:

Expected action to be taken by school as a result of absence, prior to referral to EWS.

The perceived effects of EWS intervention and benefits.

The main aims and objectives of the provision and sources of funding.

How long EWOs work with a case - when is it closed/when can it be closed.

Factors that contribute to case being referred to the Courts.

How the EWOs caseload is monitored/recorded.

Factors contributing to effective working practice.

Interviews are particularly useful because they are flexible and would give opportunities to follow up on topics mentioned above. A semi-structured interview format was selected so that the researcher was able to work out the open-ended questions to be answered, but was able to change the order if this seemed appropriate in the context of the conversation. The decision was made not to tape the interview but notes of the key points were taken throughout the conversation. However, a number of disadvantages were acknowledged and as Blaxter et al. argue 'concentrating on asking

questions, listening to the responses and taking notes is a complex process, and you will not get a complete verbatim record' (Blaxter et al., 1996: 155). During this phase of the study a total of 48 interviews were conducted. Again, as with the questionnaire, in designing the interview schedule the researcher drew on her own experience as an EWO to structure the conversation in such a way as to allow opportunities to explore subjects with flexibility of a wide ranging discussion if deemed appropriate.

The researcher developed the idea of asking EWOs participating in this study to complete a diary recording professional activities to specific cases i.e. interventions and strategies used in each case. This would provide valuable information about work patterns and could be used as a preliminary to an interview as a question-generating device. Additionally, EWOs were asked to describe in detail the more noteworthy aspects of their job behaviour. Bell (1999: 105-106) refers to this as the critical incident technique and would allow the researcher to identify aspects of the work that is particularly effective in contributing to a successful working practice. The diary/log sheets along with observations further provided data, which allowed the categorisation of the professional skills of the EWO.

3.6.4 Processing Interview Data

Interview transcripts were coded in terms of key concepts. Subsequent analysis highlighted any trends or differences in the availability and emphasis of individual EWS provision but in order to focus on critical issues of effectively re-integrating the school non-attender the researcher studied data from the diary/log sheets. One of the main advantages of using this technique was that it enabled the researcher to analyse the before and after impact of changes made in a process. For example, what is the most effective intervention used by an EWO working with the school non-attender? As well as, has the initiation of a quality improvement programme reduced the figure of non-attendance?

Qualitative data gathered from the case studies contributed to the action research strand of the study. One of the great strengths of the case study method is that it is considered to be a 'step to action' beginning in a world of action and contributing to it (Cohen & Manion, 1994: 123). By identifying and selecting effective practice of the case study

participants the researcher was then able to apply these methods of interventions to her own working practice and cross-check the impact for analysis purposes.

It should be noted here that the researcher gave consideration to the 'ownership' of the data gathered. It was Laurence Stenhouse who maintained that people who 'give' data in an interview should have some control over that data (Burgess & Ruddick, 1993: 13). He worked to the principle that interviewees should receive transcripts of their interviews so that they could accept responsibility for their words and authorise their use in any research report. However, as this would be time consuming for the researcher, the option of receiving a transcript was offered to the participants of this study and would be acted upon if requested.

3.6.5 Task-centred Model

The aim of this section of the enquiry was for the researcher to establish performance indicators, a measure of effectiveness, indicators of ineffectiveness, and to establish a model of good practice. The measurement of a successful and effective outcome was the pupil resuming full-time education at school or otherwise within a maximum of 24 weeks. The task-centred model of social work practice (Reid, 1992) was used as an illustration of 'elements of good practice' throughout the interviews and in data analysis.

The task-centred model is a short-term, problem solving approach to social work practice (Reid, 1992). The model consists of three sections. The initial section normally takes from one to two interviews although some cases may require more. It ends up setting initial tasks. The middle section starts with the next session. Changes in the problems and the outcome of the tasks are reviewed at the beginning of the interview:

Initial Phase – Assessment, Exploration and Setting Goals

Middle Phase – Task Planning and Implementation Sequence

Termination Phase – Final Problem Review.

If tasks have been accomplished, new tasks are developed. If tasks have not been attained, an effort is made to identify obstacles to task accomplishment. Some obstacles may be resolved in the session; others may require tasks in their own right. Still others

might prove insurmountable, in which case a different task strategy may be adopted. The heart of the middle phase is devoted to the development of external client tasks, making use of task-planning procedures. Although only one session (the final one) is devoted to termination, the process of terminating is actually begun in the initial phase when the duration of treatment is set. Reminders of numbers of sessions left as well as discussion of modifications of original limits keep termination alive throughout the course of service. The final session is designed to emphasise what clients have learned and accomplished.

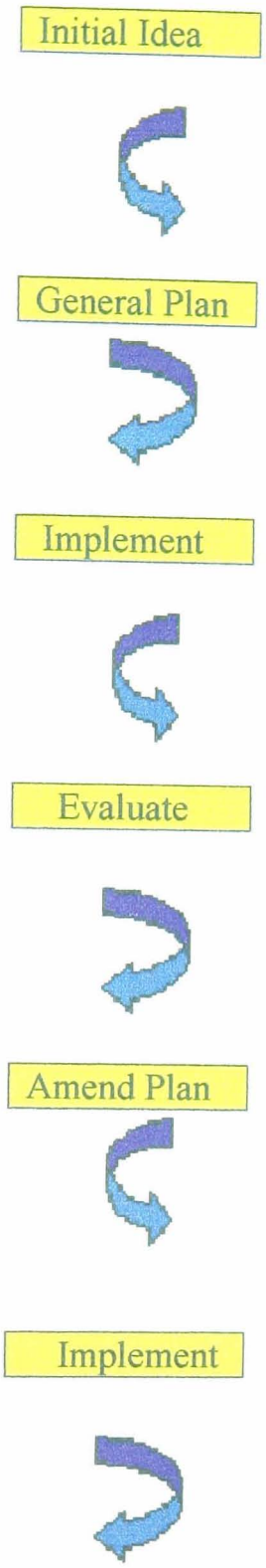
3.7 Action Research

As a practising EWO with her own personal and professional views the researcher has been able to develop the study further by undertaking action research. Practitioner research and action research have sometimes been portrayed as synonymous. However, while action research is often practitioner research, much practitioner research is not necessarily action research. The concept of action research has its origins in the work of social psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951) who developed and applied it over a number of years in a series of community experiments (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). This is a participatory research process (see figure 5, page 94), which helps practitioners to investigate an aspect of their experience with a view to solving problems and improving practice.

Lewin (1951) described action research as proceeding in a spiral of steps, each composed of planning, action and evaluation of the result of action (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). In practice the process begins with a general idea that some kind of improvement or change is desirable. The practitioners themselves identify an area to be researched, selecting the research techniques. Key points about action research:

> Action research is an approach to improving education by changing it and learning from the consequences of change.
>
> Action research is participatory: it is research through which people work towards the improvement of their own practices.
>
> Action research develops through the self-reflective spiral: planning, implementing, evaluating and then re-planning and further implementing.
>
> (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988: 22.)

FIGURE 5: A MODEL OF 'ACTION RESEARCH'



(Scott and Sealey, 1993: 5)

Action research is a research design linking the research process to a practical purpose and leads to change. The second, complementary, aspect of this stage of the study is designed to engage with the school non-attender.

As explained earlier, the researcher identified areas of her work about which she did not feel completely satisfied, therefore as part of this study a two-year action research investigation was conducted at the school she was then covering as an EWO – School A. This section of the research coincided with the appointment of a new head teacher who joined the school in June 1998. She was alerted to the researcher's dual role i.e. EWO and researcher and did not raise any objections. Permission was granted from the Head of the Education Welfare Service to collect data on the school's practice of improving attendance and reducing truancy.

For the purposes of this section of the study, a much more participatory role was adopted by the researcher involving her in presentations, school assemblies, group work, providing staff training, advising on policy and procedures and facilitating bullying workshops. The responsiveness of action research allows it to be used to develop hypotheses from the data, 'on the run' as it were. Again, a cyclic process allows this to happen more easily. If each step is preceded by planning and followed by review, learning by the researcher is greater. It was the intention of the researcher to take what she had observed as good practice from other EWOs taking part in the study and experiment with it at School A with a view to improving school attendance.

3.7.1 Action Plan

In order to tackle the research question of how to effectively re-engage the school non-attender an action plan was created outlining the two-year time-scale for this section of the project and what activities would take place in this period. Having found ways of tackling the research question, the decision was made to use the following methods to find out about each of the problem areas identified. Firstly, collection and analysis of attendance/punctuality data by compiling weekly, termly and annual attendance figures of registration groups, year groups and whole school via the use of a computerised registration system. This allowed for graphical representations of the data to be produced on spreadsheets thus allowing the researcher to keep track of attendance patterns throughout the academic year.

Secondly, targeting individual absentees and groups by providing a 30 minute classroom based personal and social education session to year groups 8 and 9; working

with individual pupils and their families over a period of up to twelve weeks, providing support and advice; over a two day period inviting parents of all pupils who achieve less than 80% attendance into the school for a 15 minute interview; a non-attenders group based on the principle of 'circle time' meeting for one hour, each week for six sessions during which time a diary was kept; at the end of each term sending letters to all those pupils who have failed to achieve 90% attendance, which were recorded, monitored and if need be, followed up with an interview at home or the school.

Thirdly, to address the issue of the re-integration of long-term absentees, weekly two-hour consultation meetings with school staff to discuss poor attenders were planned. Meetings and agreed actions were recorded and staff given a copy. Interviews of between 15-30 minutes held with non-attender and parents to agree course of action. Meetings were recorded and each person present given a copy of agreed plan.

A diary of events as recorded by the researcher, was maintained throughout this section of the study. The purpose of the diary, as suggested by Scott and Sealey (1993), was to record 'observations, feelings, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, hypotheses and explanations' over a period of time. One of the advantages of keeping a diary is it is an important record of the researchers' perceptions of events as they occur. Thus, it allowed the recording of the changing activities and practice that were tried and tested in an attempt to improve School A's attendance rates.

3.7.2 Processing Action Research Data

The action research process starts with small cycles of planning, acting, observing and evaluation, which can help to define issues and ideas. To achieve action, action research is responsive. It has to be able to respond to the emerging needs of the situation. It must be flexible in a way that some research methods cannot be. It tends to be cyclic and it is qualitative in that it deals more with language than with numbers. Action research tends to be reflective encouraging critical reflection upon the process and outcomes. In this study the researcher first recollected and then critiqued what has already happened using the early cycles to help decide how to conduct the later cycles. In the later cycles, the interpretations developed in the early cycles are tested, challenged and refined. To put this differently, certain steps tend to recur, in more-or-

less similar order, at different phases of an action research study. At the same time progress is made towards appropriate action and research outcomes.

The major justification for using action research methods at this stage of the study is that they can be responsive to the situation in a way that other research methods cannot, at least in the short term. It is the combination of critical reflection and flexibility, which allowed the researcher to challenge the emerging conclusions by vigorously planning, implementing and evaluating activities.

3.8 Secondary Data

The education welfare service plays a key role in preventing and combating truancy and school absenteeism. However, as expressed earlier, the service has been criticised for not having 'nationally agreed norms' for education welfare officers (Reid, 1999). There is currently no national charter on the role and contractual terms and conditions of service of the education welfare profession. The third section of the study deals exclusively with the problem of generating professional development and innovation amongst education welfare staff in a way that is directly related to current operating procedures and problems involving a high proportion of those staff. It involves the stimulation of new models and fresh approaches to practice and does not involve high levels of expenditure. Furthermore, it fosters collaboration and teamwork in the process.

This final section of the data collection was heavily informed by secondary data, that is 'data which has already been collected, and possibly also analysed, by somebody else' (Blaxter et al., 1996: 151). Documents were used in conjunction with interviews of management staff and could be described as 'directive documents from external bodies' (Scott & Sealey, 1993: 52). Examples of documents that formed secondary data for this study included government reports and circulars, Ofsted reports, local education authority policies and guidelines on practice.

Through the analysis of data collected from this study it was the researcher's intention to identify elements of successful organisational and management processes by interviewing three Heads of Services and Managers from the United Kingdom and by

attending a conference held in Las Vegas, Nevada and interviewing three school social workers (equivalent of UK EWOs). All interviews were conducted in privacy during work time, and with strong assurances of the right to confidentiality and anonymity.

The semi-structured interviews were intended to ensure that all interviewees could speak generally about the issues currently facing the EWS as well as comment on the effectiveness of practice in their LEA. Each interview lasted on average 30 minutes and through interviewing senior managers it was possible to develop a model of how an effective education welfare service should be structured. Notes were taken during the interviews rather than taped and transcribed as it was considered that in this section of the study it would be sufficient to 'record instant key points' (Blaxter, et al., 1996: 154).

3.9 Summary

The design of this methodology is multi-methodological and as can be seen from the diagram in Figure 6 (page 98), it is largely qualitative, using both the case studies and action research approaches and combining observation, interview and questionnaire techniques. Figure 7 (page 99) is a diagram of the research strategy undertaken to guide the collection of data.

Figure 6: Methodogical Approach

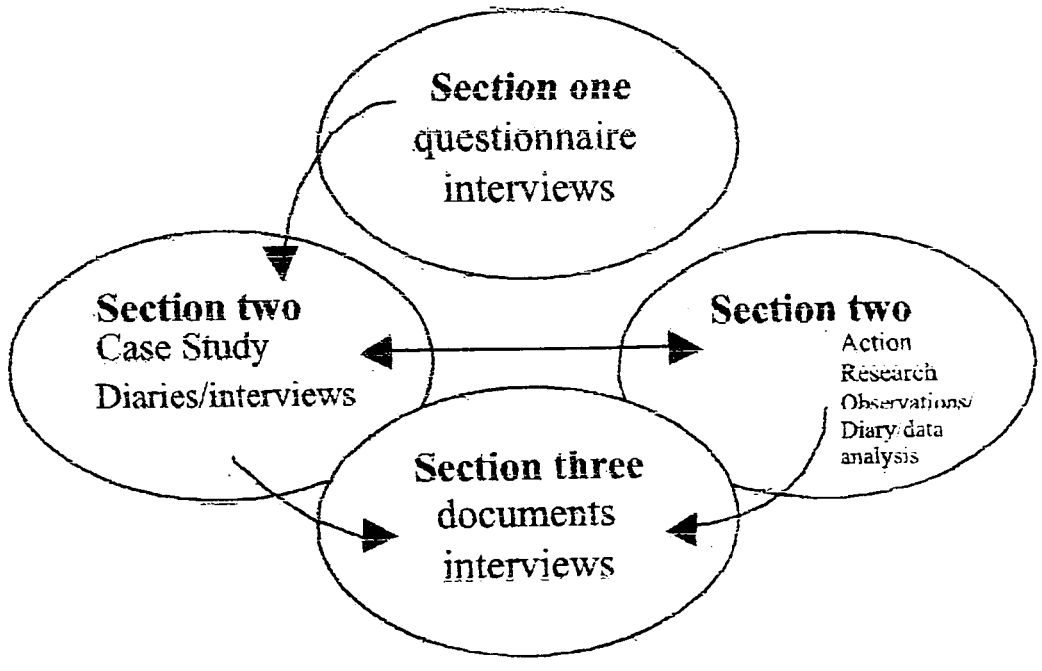
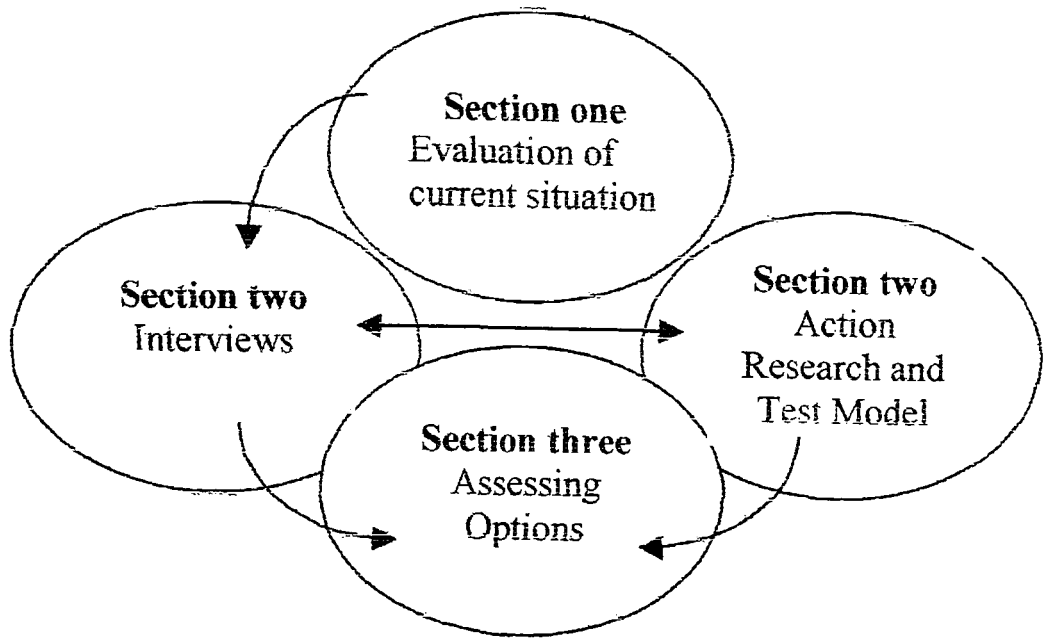


Figure 7: Research Strategy



This chapter has given an overview of the process of data collection. The lead methodological approach has been the interview technique that has enabled the researcher to pursue the collection of data as part of a social process whilst at the same time permitted the interpersonal process to develop thus allowing the interviewer continuous evaluation of the data collected. The research strategy involved a survey of 90 EWOs and from this sample 16 volunteers were sought to go through to the next phase of the research. This involved interviewing the 16 EWOs on three separate occasions over a 6-month period. Each of the EWOs presented four case studies from their current caseload to be monitored over this time. Following this period an audit of cases was conducted and from this data a good practice model was developed. The good practice model was tried and tested by the researcher in the next stage of the audit. The following chapters will describe the findings from the study focusing on the attributes and qualifications of Education Welfare Officers leading to a discussion of the range of duties and interventions employed by individual officers.

Chapter Four: The effectiveness of the EWS – survey of practitioners

4.1 Introduction

Recent research suggests that LEAs might reflect on the range of strategies they have adopted to address non-attendance (Atkinson et al., 2000b: 190) and consider whether they have achieved an appropriate balance between preventative and remedial approaches. However, individual officers can and do exercise considerable powers, most notably in their ability to prosecute parents for the non-attendance of their children.

This study is about the work carried out on behalf of Local Education Authorities towards improving attendances by pupils in school. Or, to put it the other way round, to decrease pupil absenteeism. Both truancy and illegal employment come into the Department for Education and Skills' category of improving attendance, but by far the larger problem is truancy. There is huge backing for its reduction from government although the question as to whether the LEAs should continue to be in charge has not yet been addressed.

The causes of absenteeism are not researched or investigated here, but it has been impossible to discuss the findings without referring to these in passing.

The work towards better pupil attendance is delegated by the LEAs to an array of staff with a variety of job titles, job descriptions, job conditions, backgrounds and expectations. The methods they use vary widely, from first-day response to intensive EWO support for pupils. The reduction in absenteeism that has been achieved has differed from school to school but also in individual schools from time to time. The latter, in particular, points to the operation of something more than chance and differences between school catchment areas. If there are associations, be they positive or negative, between different ways of managing absenteeism and its reduction (or growth!) then it is vital to the way forward to identify the factors that made the difference.

Two aspects of this are, firstly the collection and examination of data in context, in actual situations and, secondly to put these findings into the broader picture of the Education Welfare Service as a whole and identify what is most effective for the end result of getting pupils back into school. Also we should identify what, if anything is counterproductive.

However, having identified the best interventions is only the first step. The more difficult one is to communicate findings, train staff in these methods and monitor the outcomes. Achieving this requires knowledge of the EWO personnel and their present backgrounds and management. Training staff may not be practicable without changing the service first. This study presents data on these issues, starting with the questionnaires and moving on to data gathering from targeted subjects.

4.2 Questionnaire distribution

As described in the methodology, 90 questionnaires were distributed to EWOs in 6 authorities. At this stage of the study, information was gathered in order to record EWS activities and initiatives aimed at improving attendance. The purpose of the questionnaire was to extract information from a variety of EWOs in order to provide a context for the subsequent in-depth interviews and observations. Questions investigated various aspects of the staff, their roles and their working practices, including the similarities and differences revealed. Following a telephone call to area managers, 59 questionnaires were returned giving a response rate of 66%. Four questionnaires were returned uncompleted for the survey explained by the manager as a 'flat refusal to complete' by EWOs from the same authority. All the authorities were represented. Data obtained from the respondents could be broadly grouped into those concerning attributes of the individual EWOs, individuals' perception of their role as an EWO, training, qualifications, caseload, supervision, working practices, range of interventions used with school non-attenders, specialisation, aspects of work that may contribute to a model of good working practice, areas of the service needing most review and development and finally, topics identified for further study.

4.3 Attributes of the individual EWO.

Respondents were asked to comment on their professional backgrounds, in particular areas of previous employment and any qualifications held. The following data was collected: professional title, hours worked, qualifications i.e. degree, CQSW or a Diploma in Social Work, previous career and length of time in the service. Each of these attributes will be discussed in sections 4.3.1- 4.3.4.

4.3.1 Professional title

There is not a nationally agreed professional title for the job under investigation here. In some LEAs officers are known as 'Education Welfare Officers' or 'EWOs' and in others they are known as 'Education Social Workers' or 'ESWs'.

Earlier in this study, professionals working with school non-attenders were referred to as EWO/EWSs. However, following the analysis of the questionnaires where the data showed that over 50% of the sample were practising under the title of EWO, it was decided to refer to all respondents as EWOs. This has been carried forward through the rest of this study.

Halford's study (1994) suggested that this division is just one of the indicators of the division within the EWS nationally. This implication is discussed at length later.

4.3.2 Qualifications

As discussed earlier, there is no recognised qualification for the EWS. The training backgrounds of EWOs are varied, some are entirely untrained, others partially, whilst the remainder hold full academic and/or professional qualifications. Overall, 55% of respondents were qualified to a degree level; 28 had degrees and of these 7 held a Diploma in Social Work, 3 held higher degrees and one held a PGCE. The qualification for EWOs with most currency is the Diploma in Social Work (what was the CQSW), a degree or a diploma in youth work. One EWO interviewed commented that seven members of his team were qualified social workers and the aim was 'to move towards a

fully qualified service'. Eight respondents who held a degree had been qualified teachers, some of whom worked in the area of special educational needs.

Whilst recognising the importance of having qualifications and standards, one respondent commented on whether the DipSW was the most suitable qualification as the enforcement aspect of the work could cause a problem for those trained in social work. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

LEAs continue to aim to recruit EWOs who are social work trained and yet, considering the tasks the EWOs are expected to administer, e.g. negotiating a re-integration programme for a non-attender as well as having an understanding of the way schools operate, it would be more appropriate to the role of the EWO to recruit officers with an educational background. Data in this study indicates a conflict of intentions. For example, 17% of respondents were from an educational background against 21% from a social work background. Yet the qualification that is considered appropriate to the profession by the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE) is the Diploma in Social Work. The division within the EWS is apparent even at the recruitment stage.

4.3.3 Previous career

Respondents were asked if there were skills from previous career that had been useful in role of EWO. This data encompassed a range of previous employment or backgrounds, in particular social work and teaching. The main previous career was social work (21%). Teaching and lecturing was 17%, including 3 former teachers with higher degrees – this was a surprising result as many authorities recruit EWOs with no formal qualifications (Halford, 1994). Therefore it seemed an unlikely choice of profession for someone who had acquired a formal qualification. 7% were from the police force and the others from a wide range of backgrounds including administration posts in an educational setting. 92% of all respondents believed that skills acquired from their previous career were useful in their EWO role. Respondents said these skills included understanding, communicating, working with children, report writing, assessing, counselling, interviewing, liaising with others, negotiating, organisationing and listening.

4.3.4 Length of time in the service

Respondents had, in general, significant length of experience, with 50% having between 5 and 10 years' experience and 20% having over 10 years experience. While length of service might be seen as advantageous, it does not necessarily entail continuing training and professional development. Without ongoing training, experience can lead to repetition of past practice and ultimately the reproduction of poor practice. The figures for the length of time in service for respondents in this study were:

Range 2 months – 28 years
Mean – 6.25 years
Median – 5 years
Mode – 3 years.

Data for professional title, hours worked, qualifications and previous career are given in Table 2 (page 105).

TABLE 2: ATTRIBUTES OF OFFICERS IN THE SERVICE

Professional Title	Full or Part-time	Qualifications	Previous careers
Education Welfare Officer 54%	13 full-time 15 part-time	11 degrees 1 higher degree (60% unqualified staff 40% qualified staff)	3 teachers 4 social workers 1 police officer 6 administrators 1 youth worker 1 analytical chemist 1 croupier
Education Social Worker 40%	18 full-time 3 part-time	4 degrees 7 degree/DipSW 2 higher degrees 1 degree/PGCE (43% unqualified staff 57% qualified staff)	5 teachers 4 social workers 2 EWOs 3 police officers 1 youth worker 1 pig farmer
Assistant Education Social Worker 6%	1 full-time 2 part-time	2 degrees 1 Diploma in Youth & Community	1 teacher 1 youth worker 1 'psychology'

4.4 EWO's perception of the role

The perception of the EWO role differed between qualified and unqualified staff. Of the 25 people (46%) who were already qualified with a degree or with a CQSW/DipSW (9 of whom had been teachers) thirteen said they regarded their role specifically as school attendance regulators, seven respondents perceived their role to be working towards helping a child reach his or her full potential by receiving a full-time education and five did not answer the question.

Of the remaining 27 (54%) unqualified EWOs 10 people (39%) were clear about their role and described it as 'enforcing school attendance', 'investigating school absences', 'soft policing', 'school board man' and 'ensuring and maintaining good levels of attendance'. 2 people (6%) did not answer the question and 15 people (55%) appeared

to see their role in a different light from current government guidelines and considered it as being a 'supportive and caring', 'making a difference' and 'communicator, negotiator and arbitrator'.

The confusion about the role of the EWO presents two issues that the EWS management should be aware of. Firstly, clearly there is a discrepancy amongst EWOs what the role is is it that of law enforcer i.e. enforcing school attendance or is it a social work role providing support to families experiencing problems? Secondly, if as it appears from data presented here EWOs are unclear about their role then without doubt consumers of the service such as schools and pupils and their families must also be confused. The challenge for EWS management is to clarify the role of the EWO and to focus the training on consumer needs.

4.5 Training

Areas investigated were:

What kind of training?
Training currently provided
Training needs identified by staff.

4.5.1 What kind of training?

Training in general was valued:

> Good training promotes confidence...the introduction of target sheets has made EWOs confident because of the structure and process guidance. (EWO.)

However, of those who had attended training courses, 37% of respondents stated that they had not found the training useful. Unsurprisingly, when asked what skills acquired from previous career were useful as a practising EWO, 92% of responses stated people related skills including an ability to: work with children (9%); negotiate (8%); communicate (14%); understand (12%); interview (10%); assessment skills (10%); counsel (12%). Additionally, report writing and organisational skills were also cited as being transferable skills. However, different individuals had different perceptions:

> A diploma in social work (DipSW) is not an appropriate qualification, as you do not need to be a social worker or a counsellor to do the job. It can be detrimental but you do need core skills. (EWO, holder of a degree and a trained counsellor.)

4.5.2 Training currently provided

Each authority taking part in the survey offered some training to all its staff. Full-time staff fared better than part-time: 36% of part-time EWOs, including those who worked term-time only, received no training compared with 16% of full-time staff. 59% of EWOs working full-time had attended between one and three training courses in the previous year compared with only 40% of part-time staff. Interviewees who worked part-time were asked the reason why they had not attended training sessions and each time the reply was similar, for example 'If I attend a training course it usually entails a whole day away from my duties which in turn means I have to work twice as hard to catch up, full-time workers have the whole week to rearrange their appointments'. It may be assumed that while local authorities are saving money employing part-time staff they are not providing them with sufficient time to train to do a professional job.

A wide range of training was provided for EWOs ranging from shadowing a more experienced officer to a full and structured induction programme. The four main training areas referred to, in rank order, by questionnaire respondents and interviewees are working with difficult pupils and families, court work (including training on Education Supervision Orders), IT skills and report writing and case management notes.

The data shows that training is concentrated in the early years of work as an EWO. Induction courses at the start of employment were common, but in the following years training take-up showed wide variation between officers.

The relation between length of service and number of training courses taken was investigated. It was found that nineteen respondents with between one and five years experience attended between one and three training courses in the previous twelve months. 22% of those with five years or more service attended no professional development courses. This suggests that four-fifths of long-service EWOs are taking training courses and continuing to develop professionally.

4.5.3 Training needs identified by staff

Questionnaires revealed all respondents said they had received very little training as an EWO; in one authority there is now in place an induction programme consisting of one afternoon each month for six months. Respondents identified the following areas that they consider lacking in the training currently provided: working with difficult families, counselling skills, interventions and assessment procedure and examples of good/poor practice.

Those respondents who answered the question (75%) said that their work would benefit from training in the following areas of strategies for working with difficult families – 26%; court work – 24%; IT skills – 22% and report writing -22%.

Handling difficult families in particular would indicate a need for training to incorporate reviewing good practice and acquiring a deeper understanding of the setting. This suggests the need for training related to the provision of education in our schools and the provision of a qualification unique to the profession of education welfare:

> Given the poor response of social services social work staff to educational matters, it could be argued that the Diploma in Social Work is not necessarily the most appropriate qualification for EWOs but the lack of any agreed professional qualification means that EWOs are disadvantaged in both intra and inter agency work. (Eric Blyth 1998: 40.)

Of those who had attended training courses, 37% of respondents stated that they had not found the training useful. When asked to state an area of training that had not been particularly useful to the respondent, 25% mentioned individual courses. In rank order these are:

Education Supervision Order course
IT Skills
Dealing with aggression
Court work
Child Protection
Children Act 1989
Performance Management
Confidentiality
Administration - filling out forms
Presentation Skills
Communication and Safety.

These findings would seem to suggest something about the standard of the training. perhaps the training presentations themselves, rather than the topic, as each of the courses mentioned in this section had been referred to earlier as areas of working practice that would benefit from training programmes. Knowledge of each of these areas is absolutely vital to the working practice of the EWO. They are listed in the core duties of the EWO (page 32).

Those who did find training useful were those EWOs with one to five years' experience. The response of this group to the question 'can you state an area of training that was particularly useful to you' was interesting. Child Protection courses were the most popular. The respondent with the most experience (28 years) did not answer the question.

IT skills were ranked near to the top of the list, which is not surprising considering the introduction of computerised registration systems. This coupled with the proposal from the Audit Commission (1999) that LEAs should be assisting schools in their management of absences, rather than concentrating on individual casework with pupils, should highlight the need for the development of IT skills. Training is an important issue for the development of individual officers and for the effective use of their time. All aspects of training from the subject matter to the quality of delivery need to be consistently revisited.

4.6 Working practices

The split into EWSs and EWOs with separate titles and backgrounds suggests that there may be differences in how the two groups actually carry out their duties on the ground.

The EWSs can be described as the school enforcement arm of the Local Education Authority, but an enforcement arm that primarily uses social work methods. Halford's study (1994) pointed to different frequencies of carrying out parts of the job. This was explored during the questionnaires and interviews of this survey as follows.

4.6.1 Duties

Respondents were asked to indicate any duties that are included in their daily working practice. For survey data analysis the list of duties was divided into categories. For example the first category included visiting schools, home visits, administration while the second category included (complementary) duties such as supporting excluded pupils, providing group work, one-to-one work with pupils. The basis of classification for this was that the core duties formed part of the EWO's job description whilst complementary were not part of everyday tasks and not performed by every EWO.

Respondents were asked how often they performed these duties i.e. frequently, occasionally or never. 78% of respondents frequently performed the basic duties with only 22% carrying out the advanced duties. Of the 22%, half were EWOs with only one to four years of experience. Data indicates that the more long serving EWOs were less likely to perform anything other than the basic tasks expected of them with all the more specialised tasks e.g. preventative work in schools, being undertaken by the less experienced.

The allocation of routine and more demanding tasks to EWOs does not correlate with the expected duties of the EWO. There are two implications here. On the positive side, one interpretation is that supervisors and managers may be successfully using judgement and management skills that are not recognised in their job descriptions. However, it is also possible that managers could be failing to match tasks with officers' experience.

4.6.2 Frequency of different duties

The frequencies with which actions were undertaken were categorised by respondents on a three-point scale (frequently, occasionally and never). Tables 3a (page 112) and 3b (page 113) show the most regular duties in order of frequency (1)-(9).

The unqualified EWOs appear to represent the LEA more often in Court than the qualified ESW. 95% of EWOs visit homes more frequently, compared to 89% of

ESWs. 28% of EWOs frequently support excluded pupils 28% while only 7% ESWs do so frequently.

The government has clearly signalled its intention that the promotion of school attendance must be a central function of the service. The 1999 Guidance from the DfEE *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* suggests that EWOs work closely with schools and families to resolve attendance issues (p.49) repeating the statement first made in Circular 11/91:

> The principal function of the Education Welfare Service is to help parents and LEAs meet their statutory obligations on school attendance. The EWS is the attendance enforcement arm of most LEAs. Its officers are able to bring to the assistance of schools a wide range of skills. Through their home visiting, they may be especially well placed to assess a non-attenders problem in the wider family context. (DfEE, 1994, para.14.)

Table 3a: Daily duties of education social workers

n=21 Education Social Workers		Frequently	Occasionally	Never
(1)	Visiting schools	96%		
(1)	Administration eg letter writing	96%	0.3%	
(3)	Home Visits	89%		
(4)	Arranging/attending meetings between school/parents	64%	32%	
(4)	Attending meetings on behalf of LEA eg case conferences	64%	21%	
(4)	Child Protection	64%	28%	7%
(7)	Attending inter-agency panel eg youth justice panel	32%		18%
(8)	Arranging home tuition (including education otherwise)	25%	36%	
(9)	Supporting children with SEN	21%	46%	
(9)	Arranging clothing grants	21%	32%	21%
	Employment of school aged children	14%	57%	25%
	Presenting court cases on behalf of LEA	11%	61%	14%
	Supervising officer on Education Supervision Order	11%	36%	39%
	Escorting pupils to day schools	11%	46%	
	Supporting excluded pupils until alternative place found	7%	50%	
	Escorting pupils to/from residential school		36%	46%
	Arranging free school meals		28%	28%

Table 3b: daily duties of education welfare officers

n=21 Education Social Workers		Frequently	Occasionally	Never
(1)	Visiting schools	100%		
(2)	Administration eg letter writing	96%	4%	
(3)	Home Visits	95%		
(4)	Attending meetings on behalf of LEA eg case conferences	76%	10%	
(5)	Arranging/attending meetings between school/parents	66%	33%	
(6)	Child Protection	52%	24%	
(7)	Presenting court cases on behalf of LEA	33%	48%	19%
(8)	Supporting excluded pupils until alternative place found	28%	33%	
(9)	Arranging home tuition (including education otherwise)	24%	33%	
	Employment of school aged children	10%	58%	32%
	Supervising officer on Education Supervision Order		38%	19%
	Supporting children with SEN		33%	14%
	Escorting pupils to day schools		38%	9%
	Escorting pupils to/from residential school			57%
	Arranging free school meals			52%
	Arranging clothing grants			43%
	Attending inter-agency panel eg youth justice panel			33%

It is interesting to note that the main duties of the respondents, both ESWs and EWOs, taking part in this survey are consulting with schools and administrative duties (98% and 88% respectively). 85% of the sample reported 'frequently' conducting home visits. Other duties that are considered to be core activities (Atkinson et al, 2000a: 4) were under-represented. For example, child employment, child protection, working with excluded pupils and special educational needs were reported as 'occasionally' undertaken duties. Over half the respondents (31) reported 'occasionally' being involved in child employment and 21 reported 'never' administering the task. Yet this particular duty has been cited by EWS managers as being a main area of work for the service (Atkinson et al. 2000a: 4). The question emerges then why, if these two groups of practitioners are actually conducting exactly the same duties are they not practising under the same title?

A surprising factor that has emerged from the data collected was that the most 'frequent' contacts an EWO has in the course of a working day is with adults such as meetings with parents and school staff rather than with the child and yet 90% of respondents saw their role as working with children (discussed further in 5.5).

4.7 Caseload

According to government guidelines the principle function of the EWO is to promote regular school attendance and to assist in solving difficulties that may lead to a child not attending school regularly (Ofsted, 1995). The size of the problem and the finite budget to deal with it will naturally tend to generate high caseloads for officers. Data, even if partial, on the number of absentee pupils shows that the problem is concentrated in particular places and times. It is not uniform over one LEA area, or one district, nor in one location over time. The potential and actual caseload may thus be expected to vary widely. National data on the size of caseloads, by locality, time and other variables such as the seniority of the case officer, are very desirable.

4.7.1 Number of schools

EWOs in the survey each had an allocated 'patch', generally one or two secondary schools plus their contributory primary schools. Almost 50% of respondents reported

that they were responsible for monitoring the attendance, generally, for 1 secondary school and 9 primary schools. Data shows 88% of EWOs who took part in the survey were allocated at least one secondary school and in some cases 3.

The average for EWOs with one to three years experience was 1.1 secondary schools, while the average for those with ten years plus experience was 1.2 secondary schools – overall the secondary mode was 1. There appears to be little variation in the number of secondary schools allocated to EWOs, varying between 1 and 7 depending on hours worked.

4.7.2 Referral source

In general, referrals were taken from school staff with 80% of EWOs frequently obtaining referrals from Heads of Year and 59% reporting occasionally taking referrals from parents/guardians. One respondent commented that 'regular liaison with school staff provided an overview of what was going on in schools and enable early intervention'. One LEA chose to use service-level agreements (SLAs) with schools and as this was considered an area of effective practice. These agreements clearly set out the role and tasks of the school and the EWO. By setting a limited amount of time, the use of SLAs was considered to focus the mind and clarify EWS and school responsibilities by detailing exactly what service schools were entitled to and what the EWO could and could not do.

4.7.3 Number of active cases

In contrast to the small variation in secondary school numbers, number of cases open to individual officers shows there is a significant disparity – data collected reported a range of 5-200 cases among respondents. This included active and inactive cases. The one example of 200 cases, only 120 were active. The overall mean of 29.38 could not be trusted, as it seemed some EWOs exaggerated; for example one response was 'lorry loads plus a half'. If the reason for this was the logjam of inactive or unresolved cases, caseload management is involved rather than allocation of original cases. Therefore it would appear that the reason for some large caseloads is problems of operational practice.

One respondent with sixteen years' service had 200 cases and another with seventeen years experience had 134 cases. The average caseload of EWOs with one to three years experience was 23 cases. When asked the current number of active cases the responses were analysed as follows:

Range: 5-120
Mean: 29
Median: 40.

There is no single measure of a caseload. One reason for this is that there is no standard for closing a case, so the number of cases 'on the books' is not an objective comparison of workloads. The amount and kind of work varies in an ad hoc manner for officers of varied skills and qualification. This is not helpful to managing the service efficiently. One authority had specific guidelines to monitor and supervise a case rather than allowing it to drift on, 'when in fact it should be brought to a speedier conclusion'.

4.8 Supervision

In order to promote professional and personal development, as well as providing learning opportunities, regular supervision is seen by EWS practitioners as an essential requirement to monitor effectiveness. From data collected it would appear that respondents considered effective supervision to be regular meetings on a one-to-one basis between the supervisor and the supervisee, not as an interactional process between members of a team.

4.8.1 Frequency of supervision

Regular supervision was thought by only three respondents to lead to more consistency and greater efficiency. Overall, 42% reported fortnightly sessions, 22% 3-weekly and 20% stated monthly sessions. 63% of officers with one year of experience received supervision fortnightly. 55% of those with between three and five years experience received supervision fortnightly, 50% of those with more than 10 years experience received it every three weeks.

4.8.2 Effectiveness of supervision

> Supervision is very important. I have been an EWO for 10 years and I got to the point with my third supervisor where I was thinking of leaving. I did not know what support was. Now I have a supervisor who is wonderful and supportive. (EWO.)

Four of the total number of respondents described how they felt inadequately supported by managers when criticised by schools or other agencies, while two respondents highlighted how supportive their particular smaller supervisory team was. This appeared to be an acknowledgement that supervision is not something that is given only in the context of formal sessions. One particular respondent commented that supervision is a process that was 'integral to the working life of the team, making use of the total resources placed at our disposal to meet the service objective'. In one EWS, in addition to supervision with the manager, there was a system of peer group supervision. The team met once each month and colleagues were encouraged to bring along a difficult case to discuss with peers or indeed, to bring along a case that had been successful. This encouraged the team to share good practice but at the same time develop a team spirit, team support and recognition of each others professionalism.

The importance of regular and structured supervision has been highlighted. This overlaps with a need to monitor case outcomes and use this data to target work. There is also a training implication. Training for supervisors and managers in how to manage and support their staff would seem to answer some of the negative points made.

4.9 Range of interventions used with school non-attenders

To take forward Halford's study (1994) and find specific information about the different intervention methods and frequencies in EWO practice, both the questionnaires and the interviews were used. An open question on the postal survey and discussion in the interviews with practitioners asked staff to indicate the range of interventions used when working with school non-attenders. Table 4 (page 119) is the data from these EWOs on the interventions used in their jobs. Again the interventions were categorised by respondents on a three-point scale (frequently, occasionally and never).

The most 'frequently' used interventions by EWOs was writing letters to parents and conducting home visits to advise to parents. 90% of EWOs reported these as the most 'frequently' used interventions when working with non-attenders. These findings link with data from the previously asked question of the most 'frequently' cited EWO duties – administration and home visits. However, again this does highlight the fact that the majority of the EWO's work is contacting and meeting with parents. The interventions related to the pupil such as negotiating in school measures, counselling the pupil/parent, one to one work and group work, in all the responses were cited as 'occasionally' undertaken tasks.

Of the 90 questionnaires distributed 59 were returned. The data showed that 40% of respondents 'frequently' used ten of the interventions listed. Of that 40%, 70% had been employed as EWOs between one and five years. 59% occasionally used ten of the interventions listed and of that total 54% had been in post for more than three years. These findings indicate that the more experienced officer actually applied less variation in the interventions and concentrated on the core interventions of letter writing, home visits or school meetings.

Table 4: Range Of Interventions Used By EWO (n=59)

n=59 Education Welfare Officers		Frequently	Occasionally	Never
1.	Writing letters to parents	90%	7%	
2.	Home visits to interview/advise parents	90%	7%	
3.	School meeting between HoY, parents, pupil, EWO	68%	29%	
4.	Meeting at EWS office between EWO, pupil, parents	32%	56%	8%
5.	Negotiate in-school measures eg modified curriculum	29%	51%	
---	Change of class	22%	63%	
---	Arrange contact person in school	29%	56%	
---	Arrange support in class	20%	52%	
---	Attendance chart	30%	37%	
---	Offer incentives, rewards	17%	44%	
6.	Counselling pupil/parents	48%	39%	13%
7.	One-to-one work		32%	
8.	Advise on welfare rights	20%	59%	
9.	Engage in joint agency work	39%	54%	
10.	Group work		32%	47%
11.	Participate in truancy patrols with local police		20%	64%
12.	Arranging day trips		32%	54%
13.	Refer to PRU/ESC	35%	37%	16%
14.	Refer to disaffected pupil project	22%	42%	22%
15.	Refer to children out of school panel	25%	45%	12%

Some of the commonly employed interventions can be said to require considerable levels of skill if they are to be practised successfully. Counselling and group work skills are needed for interventions 6, 7, 10 and 12, and managerial skills are needed for effective inter-agency work required by interventions 9 and 11. These skills are sufficiently similar to those employed by social workers in other agencies for a minority of EWOs to have changed their title to 'education social workers to reflect the range of their skills and tasks' (DES, 1989a: 30). In the majority of EWSs it has already been noted that the skill levels are very variable and that many EWOs may not have been trained to sufficient levels to provide complex interventions (Collins, 1999: 83).

When examining the issue of attendance matters and more specialised interventions, again differences do emerge (Table 4). There is a significant difference between the more attendance-focused EWO concentrating on attendance figures and the EWO offering more specialised intervention e.g. group work, truancy patrols and one to one work. Data suggest that all but two of the interventions (1 and 2) allow variety in practice that further suggests high level of individual decision making with regard to implementation of these approaches.

Although the previous section produced data that EWOs in general do not specialise, in practice they concentrate on using particular methods of intervention. This may be a route towards specialising if this is considered desirable.

4.10 Specialisation

Recent government guidelines (DfEE, 1999) suggest that LEAs place less emphasis on 'social work' and more on enforcement. Working relationships with families may require different roles of the EWO. For example, the situation may require authority and a detailed knowledge of legislation or the ability to liaise with other agencies. Very few LEAs have the resources to enable specialist staff to operate in different areas of expertise (Whitney, 1994:92); most staff have to play all these roles at once and need considerable skill to do so effectively. Evidence to support this has been provided by Halford's study (1994: 98).

Responses to this survey demonstrate that very few EWOs specialise in a specific area. A significant number of respondents (69%) did not specialise and only 5% stated areas of specialisation – this was in the area of Child Protection. Specialisation may be a very effective tool for the service but there is little experience to draw on to prove the need for specialist EWOs. However, given the wide spectrum of duties and tasks of the EWO it may be more cost effective for services to focus the role of the EWO perhaps by training practitioners to specialise in specific areas of the work.

4.11 Aspects of work that may contribute to a model of good working practice

Recent research suggests that the future challenge for EWSs is to link individual casework to effective policy and strategy, and liaise with a wide range of other parties concerned in its implementation (Audit Commission, 1999: 36). The report goes on to advise LEAs to 'share good practice'.

Respondents were asked to consider an aspect of work that may contribute to a model of good working practice. 72% regarded this as an important consideration (the other 18% did not respond at all).

32% identified the importance of links with other agencies, while 27% cited communicating and engaging with young people as being features of good practice. Whilst it may appear that proportionately fewer respondents felt acting as an advocate, befriending and/or counselling of pupils and their families was a feature of good practice, when asked if skills acquired from previous career had been useful as a practising EWO answers clearly indicated these characteristics to be significant to the working practice of EWOs.

The EWO and the tasks they perform cannot be changed in isolation. The relationship to partner bodies needs to remain effective or become even more so.

4.12 Areas needing most review and development in EWS

Historically the EWS has had limited training and resources, and little recognition as a profession which somewhat contrasts with the considerable powers they have to

intervene in young people's lives. Question 24 asked for suggestions as to the area of practice needing the most review and development.

Each respondent made a suggestion and in some cases, several. The list was extensive: from 52 responses, 50 suggestions were made (Appendix D: 265). Often the officers responded with a 'wish list' about their own jobs rather than an overview of the service as a whole for example 40% of respondents wished to develop a greater degree of legislative awareness in the course of their professional practice and a further 30% of suggestions focused on administrative duties.

4.13 Summary

While the primary role of the EWS is generally perceived as one of improving school attendance, the wide range of duties and interventions that the EWS are potentially involved with demonstrates the need for multi-skilled professionals. What appears to have emerged from the data gathered during this phase of the research is that while there is a broad range of duties and interventions that are 'occasionally' administered by EWOs, the majority of the work is taken up with school and home visits and also administrative duties. Therefore, it would appear that the EWO has regular contacts with the adult in the non-attenders situation (i.e. school staff or parent) not contact with the pupil.

It is apparent from data that the EWO's main relationship was usually with the adults in the family situation, rather than with particular children. This might not have been the case, however, with older children as the EWO may have spoken to them in school, but overall in the majority of cases the contact was made with the parents. Letters were addressed to parents, home visits were arranged to suit parents and in some cases, parents were threatened with prosecution. In one way this is understandable as it is the parent/s' responsibility to ensure their child attends regularly but on the other hand, it seems incredible that supporting pupils are not a clearly defined daily duty.

The daily duties listed in tables' 3a (page 112) and 3b (page 113) clearly show that the main duties of the EWO are visiting schools to discuss attendance, administration and

home visits, there is not a 'supporting school non-attenders' category. Furthermore, from the range of interventions listed in table 4 (page 120) it would be more proactive on the part of the EWO if we saw the category of 'negotiate in school measures' at the top of the list with a 100% frequency use. Surely it is about preventing long-term non-attendance and resolving issues from curriculum problems to teacher and/or peer conflicts. Perhaps time would be better spent supporting needy pupils in school rather than trying to ascertain exactly what is going on/wrong at the family home. There are no quick solutions to family problems but if problems in school are dealt with promptly entrenched cases of non-attendance may be avoided.

A small percentage of respondents (under 10% in each case) reported 'frequently' being involved in child protection work, child employment, supporting excluded pupils and pupils with special educational needs. Those who did report being involved in these tasks considered them specialised posts. The questionnaires gave support to the general perception that there is great diversity in the job and in the people doing the job. There is neither uniformity in what they believe, or indeed in what they are told, that the job entails. Nor is there monitoring across the service to discover what works and what does not work. This is an area for concern and for action.

The findings presented here raise a number of key issues that impact on the working practice of the EWO. Firstly, over 50% of respondents' view of their role did not accord with others including that of the present government. They perceived their role to be working on behalf of the non-attender and their families, when in fact government guidelines stipulate the EWO's role should be working in partnership with schools. Secondly, training provided is not reflecting the duties undertaken. For instance, respondents reported attending court and child protection training but did not find it useful. This may be because a) these particular duties are not part of the EWO's daily tasks or b) the practitioner does not get the opportunity to put training into practice and therefore does not feel the benefits of the training. Thirdly, data from the questionnaires indicates that training provision is concentrated in the early years of an EWO's career or that the training was itself unsatisfactory. There is little evidence of continued professional development, particularly with part-time practitioners. The reasons for this could be a) the EWS does not provide training relevant to the role so therefore the

EWO does not take up the opportunity to attend a training session or b) the part-time EWO does not have the time to attend a half or a whole day training session.

The staff of the EWS have views on what needs to be done both to make their own jobs more effective and to achieve the aim of reducing truancy. Other agencies have other views, and there are political issues also. An urgent task is therefore to compare and to integrate the work being done on the ground with the theories. It is also fair to suppose that within the group of respondents the majority would welcome the opportunity to acquire some expertise in the theory and practice of the techniques in question, as they seem to improve their effectiveness in dealing with non-attendance. At this stage of the study, information from questionnaires contributed to the development of an 'ideal' professional course which was further developed during the interview stage. Appendix F suggests a training course content for practitioners working to improve school attendance. In addition to court procedures and child protection training, suggestions for the course content included learning about child psychology and to contain some depth in education such as curriculum delivery and an overview of careers advice. It needs to include successful intervention methods as well as techniques for setting up 'awareness and education' for other agencies and consumers.

Volunteers were invited from the questionnaire respondents to participate in the next stage of the research. This involved being interviewed three times over a six-month period and submitting four case studies from their current caseload. Sixteen officers from four different LEAs volunteered and each gave their support over the investigative period. Each agreed to having their working practice observed. The following chapter reports on EWO interviews conducted with this topic in mind and describe their views on the general issues of service delivery. The issues raised in this phase of the research will be taken forward and developed in the following chapter. These include:

Training and supervision received.
The duties included in daily working practice.
Areas of specialisation.
Identifying effective interventions.
Determining the area of practice needing most review and development.

Chapter 5: Practitioner Perspectives

5.1 Introduction

The next section assembles information on what is actually done, by whom and what the outcome is. Contributions and data were sought from EWOs working with school non-attenders. These are discussed and analysed, and the implications for the organisation and tasks of the EWS highlighted.

The additional information came from the interviews with the sample of EWOs who had agreed to participate in the study over a six-month period. Furthermore, in an attempt to ascertain a clearer perspective of future developmental needs for practitioners the views of three managers of the EWSs (who participated in the study) and informal interviews with two senior School Social Workers from the United States of America are included in this chapter. With this information and that of the original questionnaires it was possible to produce some statistics and qualitative findings. This procedure and the results follow in this chapter.

Finally, the interviews with EWOs showed which were the important issues for the EWS. In order to go into these in more depth, the study moved on to interviewing key people, both working in the service and outside it. The findings are drawn together to a conclusion, which embodies ideas for an effective way forward. The focus of this study is on effective practice. The results pointed to those working practices which were useful, which were not so useful and the reasons why.

5.2 Methodology and sources of data.

The lead methodological approach has been the interview technique that has enabled the researcher to pursue the collection of data as part of a social process whilst at the same time permitted the interpersonal process to develop thus allowing the interviewer continuous evaluation of the data collected. This section utilises Agnew's (1990) method of 'first-person accounts' (purposely presented in a less formal and less technical manner than other sections in this report). In this study, subjects were asked to give their own first-hand explanations for truancy and recommended interventions to reduce this. For example, EWOs and managers were asked to describe their

impressions of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of current organisational practices to reduce truancy, with an eye toward remedying deficiencies in the education system. The sources are the LEAs, the interview questions and individual EWS managers.

A 6-month study was undertaken based on observations and interviews with 16 EWOs. These came from 4 LEAs: one County and three London Boroughs. Each LEA provided 4 EWOs for the study. These 16 were all fieldworkers and provided 64 cases in total where no formal action had yet been instigated. For each officer 4 cases of a pupil non-attender were studied in depth, looking at the interventions used and the outcomes. By the nature of the cases selected, it was anticipated that it would be possible to examine the full range of resources available to the service and the deployment of its energies and manpower, a commonality to all professions working with young people

Background details were noted of these pupils and a log/running sheet was given to the EWO to attach to the pupil file. Each EWO was asked what they expected to achieve and what they hoped to achieve from each case. The time span of the investigations was up to 6 months.

5.3 The interviewees

The 16 EWOs were each interviewed three times over a 6-month period. Each time more probing questions were asked as the officer's confidence was gained. Data were collected in respect of each EWO working with 4 individual school non-attenders and the interventions used. Three managers were each interviewed once during this period. The purpose of this section of the study was to report on what was considered by practitioners to be effective and ineffective strategies and interventions used when working with the school non-attender. The measurement of a successful and effective outcome was taken to be the child resuming full-time education at school or otherwise within 24 weeks. Data were collected in respect of the response of the EWO to each particular case and to measure the effectiveness of the intervention/s used against the outcome.

5.3.1 Interview topics

The topics discussed with the EWOs were:

What they thought their job entailed.
Whom they considered to be their client.
What tasks they actually did in their job and the time taken by each.
Were there common practices and/or standards provided by the LEA?
What effect did legislation have on the EWO's practices.
What resources they had in their authority including alternative provision for non-attenders.
Were the interventions of a person-centred humanitarian or traditional nature?
Was success achieved – the return of the pupil to school in 24 weeks or less?
How much time spent on child employment.

5.4 Key Issues to be investigated

Data collected from the interviews has been analysed and reported under a series of headings according to key issues. This separation is artificial and has been done to give some kind of structure to the large body of results. The headings should not be taken to indicate a clear-cut series of problems. Rather, they are all inter-related and no issue is self-contained in practice. The key issues framework is:

The job title of the EWO.
Clarification of the role and objectives of the EWO; caseload.
Who is the client? The pupil, the school or the LEA.
Liaison, integration and links. Integrating the work of the EWO and other involved agencies.
Professional status and resources available to the EWO.
Qualification and training of the EWO.

5.4.1 The Job Title of the EWO.

EWOs have a primary duty to enforce attendance (Atkinson et al., 2000: 52). However, the inclusion of 'welfare' in their job title, and the decision in some areas to assume the title of Education Social Work Service, signifies another dimension to their work.

It was found in the initial postal questionnaire that the title of just over half of the responding officers was EWO and just under half was ESW. Which do people think it should be? Officers are divided on this, which is not surprising given the confusion

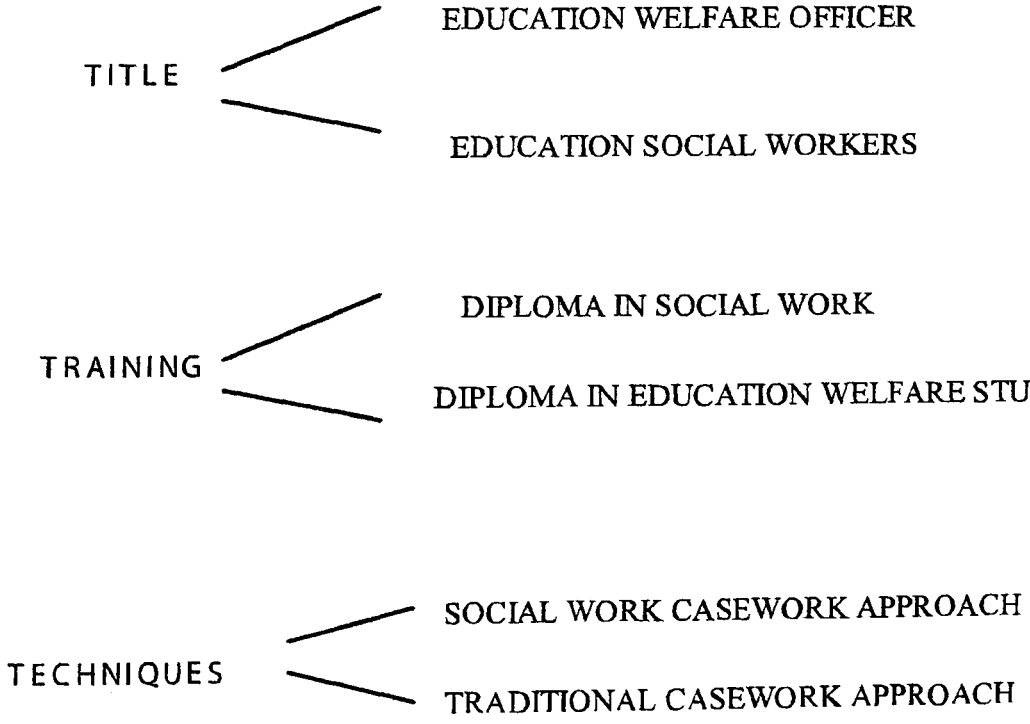
over what constitutes the job. A manager from a county council thinks that neither of these is as appropriate as plain 'Attendance Officers'.

The title is important, as the present split in titles reinforces the split into two cultures. ESWs include those who believe they are social workers specialising in education issues whereas EWOs often consider family and home situations outside their role and refer these family problems to social workers.

5.4.2. Dichotomy between social and educational cultures

The present study, as well as Halford (1994: 128) found from questionnaire responses that the title, training, qualifications and approaches to casework in the EWS divide into two. Figure 8, below, highlights the dichotomy between social and education cultures.

Figure 8: Dichotomy between social and education cultures of EWS



Some respondents to the questionnaire see the two sides and are aware of which side they favour:

> I used to get very involved with the families - very social worker. Trying to help them improve things. If they can't do that themselves - refer to social services but now I refer for prosecution. Legal action was always last resort but now it's a tool. I got entrenched with a

> family and could not help them but felt I could not refer them for prosecution because I was aware of all their problems. I was too far in. The new system makes me aware of boundaries. (EWO.)

5.4.3 Clarification of the Role and Objectives of the EWO.

5.4.3.1 Employment and miscellaneous tasks

In most areas, the EWS also monitors and regulates the employment of children of compulsory school age, including children in paid entertainment (Blyth and Cooper, 2000: 3). In each authority taking part in this study, however, the task was carried out by an administrator not an EWO.

Many individual services have developed additional functions and broadened their role to ensure that 'children are able to benefit from whatever educational opportunities are offered to them' (Blyth and Cooper, 2000: 3). In practice this means that EWOs are involved in a wide range of work with children and their families; it varies considerably from authority to authority and even from EWO to EWO. In addition to the key areas of work, such as school attendance, child employment, child protection, exclusions, special educational needs, prosecutions and education otherwise than at school (EOTAS), respondents cited some 27 other activities in relation to their areas of responsibility, although a single service would be unlikely to cover all 27. These activities are depicted in table 5 (page 130), where they are presented in alphabetical order rather than frequency as generally, theses particular activities were only mentioned by one respondent.

Table 5: Additional activities cited by EWS respondents

Advice and consultancy	Missing Children
Advocacy/negotiation (school/parents)	Necessities/clothing grants
Agency work/liaison	Parents groups
Behaviour problems in school	Pupil Referral Unit referrals
Benefits	Refugees
Bullying	Reintegration programmes
Chairing and attending panels	School INSET
Coordination of alternative curricula	School transfer and admissions
Education Supervision Orders	Support for secondary transfer
First day contact	Travellers
Free school meals administration	Truancy patrols
Home-school transport	
Home-school liaison	
Holidays/group activities	
Hygiene	
Medicals	

5.4.4 Dealing with non-attendance

Interviews explored how officers saw their role related to their primary task of dealing with non-attendance. Interviewees felt that both on their part and that of their management, there is a need to give serious consideration to a clarification of the objectives and tasks of the EWS to counteract the discrepancies between LEAs. EWOs have a duty to enforce attendance (Atkinson et al., 2000b: 52). Without exception, respondents nominated improving attendance as their primary responsibility.

Three respondents commented that achieving a balance between enforcement and welfare could be, at times, problematic. For example, it is difficult for staff to be supporting parents on the one hand and, in the other, to be taking them to court. NASWE and UNISON take the view that the EWS is a kind of Social Service specialising in education. Twelve of the interviewees in this study agreed with the statement:

> The education social work [welfare] service was felt to have a specific and unique social work task which can significantly enhance a child's individual educational opportunities and in turn the success of a school. In addition to the individual case work function there is also a great deal of work done with schools to support and develop attendance policy, to help in promoting positive attitudes to attendance

and in supporting home-school links. (NASWE & UNISON, 1998, 3.2.)

A manager pointed out that a typical school brochure would list the role of the EWO as to give social work advice, the first point of reference on case troubling school, to give breakdown on home background and to link home and school.

5.4.5 Core tasks

There is general consensus amongst practitioners and government officials that a central responsibility of the EWS is to deal with school attendance (DES, 1989a; Halford, 1994; Ofsted 1995). Quantification by the Audit Commission (1999) of 'typical' national referral patterns to the EWS revealed that 73% of referrals were for non-attendance. All respondents in the current study spent more time on non-attendance than on illegal employment or entertainment licence cases, and over a quarter of officers had never dealt with the latter.

During the first round of interviews the aim was to categorise the responsibilities of the EWO and to establish the resources available i.e. alternative provisions of education for school non-attenders. All interviewees were fieldworkers carrying out the recognised tasks allocated to the EWS, although the delivery of these services varied within and between authorities. The major responsibilities identified by respondents are promotion of regular school attendance; promotion of effective liaison between school, home and relevant welfare agencies; assisting with the identification and assessment of children with special educational needs as well as child protection issues and monitoring employment, including entertainment activities of children and where necessary intervene if the legal requirements were being infringed.

One manager characterised the EWS as concerned with both those who do not benefit from the education offered in their own terms or the terms of the school and as an administrative service reporting non-attendance and dealing with its general activities. He felt, in both cases, the interventions of the service were limited and referrals to social services and courts became major tasks. Participants who adopted this view will not find it difficult to follow recent government guidance on the role of the EWO:

> The EWO will work closely with schools and families to resolve attendance issues, arranging school and home visits as necessary. However, it is important that an appropriate balance to this work is maintained. In particular, it is inappropriate for an EWO to adopt the role of advocate for the family [author's emphasis]. (DfEE, 1997: 13.)

This theme is continued under the heading: 'Who is the client, pupil, school or LEA?' (5.5).

5.4.6 Multiple factors involved

Rates of attendance and behaviour patterns are influenced by many inter-related factors, which can broadly be divided into those relating to individual children, their family and social background; those relating to the way the school that they attend is managed; and those relating to the accessibility and appropriateness of the curriculum that they are offered and to the standard of teaching that they receive. The LEA can influence three areas but, by itself, it controls none.

One manager interviewed highlights the EWS as the only agency that has the school at the centre of its intervention work. This demands a particular knowledge of institutional characteristics, of a wide variety of liaison and multi-agency activities. The EWS is also the only agency that, as its primary obligation, must deal with non-attendance, which frequently is not considered appropriate for intervention by other agencies. Due to this, interviewees looked on the EWS as a part of the social services dealing specifically with education issues.

The general perception is that EWS is there to work for the LEA towards reducing non-attendance. It does this by taking the school as the client and working with staff both by preventing and intervening in established truancy. The EWS is expected to unravel the complex difficulties behind each case by using a number of skills to pinpoint reasons and use related skills to choose interventions. The EWS will coordinate the various agencies including social services, educational psychologist and hospital services which may be involved and coordinate their relationship with the school. They will also work directly with the non-attender to tackle the circumstances bearing on non-attendance.

This multi-agency state of affairs is discussed further under the heading: 'Liaison, integration and links' (page 137).

5.4.7 Caseload

The caseload can be measured either as every referral or as only 'active' cases. What constitutes 'active' varies. It may mean that there is no intervention going on, temporarily or for the foreseeable future, or it may be that the pupil has reached the age where they can legally leave school. Only one LEA has rules for including or excluding cases from the calculated workload.

These variations in policy and processes result in differences in the numbers of pupils counted as part of the EWOs caseload as well as differences in the number of new cases referred to the service and then added to the caseload which could be anything up to 50. Increased numbers of pupils in a caseload means that each individual receives less time and less intervention and problem solving. Three-quarters of EWOs felt that they had insufficient time to use their professional skills to help pupils who could have benefited.

A senior manager commented that regular supervision for management of caseload was thought to lead to more consistency and greater efficiency, enabling staff to be clear about how they should proceed with a particular case. Additionally, he added, data collection systems, which supported caseload management, were also thought to result in effective working. He went on to say that a closely monitored database had had a significant impact on the effective management of cases and the way in which the whole service operated.

A huge range has been found in the potential workload of different EWOs. The number of schools, size of schools and proportion of pupils referred in a school varies greatly. So does the perception of whether an EWO is responsible for the total numbers of pupils in schools in their catchments or only for those pupils referred to them. As discussed in the previous chapter three-quarters of EWOs felt that they were not responsible for the total school population in their schools. The same proportion felt that only those pupils with 50% or less attendance should attract their involvement, so

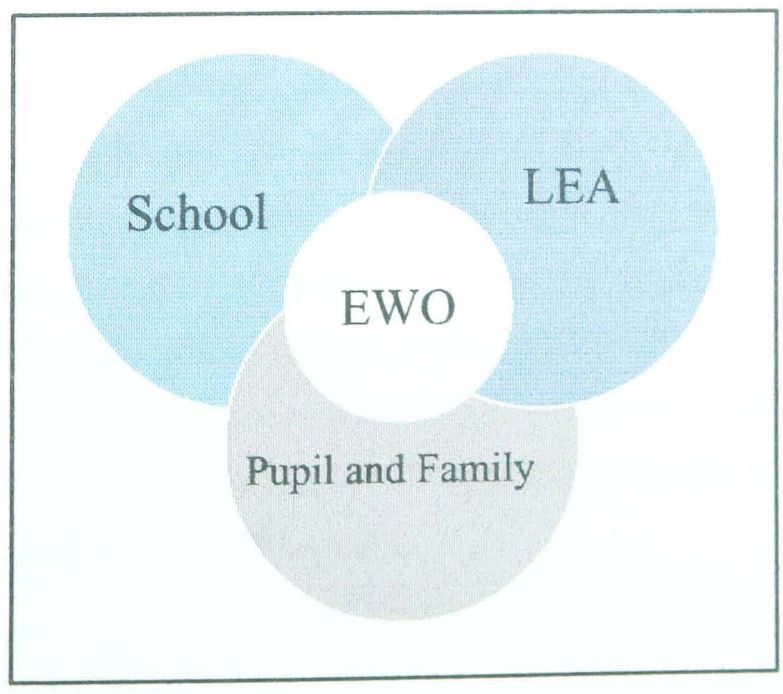
there is variation in a pupil's level of non-attendance before he or she is referred and, if referred, accepted onto the caseload of an EWO.

5.5 Who is the client?

It is not clear from EWS literature who is the client of the EWO. Therefore, each EWO interviewed was asked whom they considered to be their immediate client, was it the school, the LEA or the child and family. In discussion all EWOs replied the same; they considered the client to be the child and family. Figure 9 (page 134) illustrates the dilemma of the EWO. In theory the EWO should be working towards improving the attendance figures of the school but in practice s/he is often operating as an advocate or change agent for the child and family.

One interviewee commented on the importance of establishing good working relationships with LEA managers, school staff and pupils and their families. The EWO's aim is to identify the school non-attender and to effectively engage with the child/family so as to avoid sanctions but the main duty is to support schools to improve attendance. This role is open to interpretation. Often the EWO acts as a bridge between home and school. The motivating force appears to be the initiative of the individual officers in their respective local authorities. The EWO is an example of a professional who sits in the middle of a 'no man's land' between social control (LEA and school) and social welfare (pupil and family).

Figure 9: Who is the client?



However, one manager feels it is the LEA in its educational responsibility that the EWO works for. One EWO who had worked previously as a youth worker stated:

> One of the things I found really hard when I first joined the service was the fact that I had to speak to the parents first just to get permission to speak to the young person. As a youth worker I rarely spoke to parents, but as an EWO the majority of your work is with parents... you will be disappointed if you come into this game [EWS] thinking you are working with kids.

It was found in this survey that a number of EWOs were unsympathetic to schools and found it difficult to work in partnership with them. The DfEE recognises this as a problem: it is 'of crucial importance to establish an effective working relationship between schools and the EWS' (DfEE, 1999:18). As an example of this attitude, one of the EWO interviewees with four years experience said that she believed that she was working for the client and had spent time acting as an advocate on behalf of the family. As part of an Ofsted inspection she was to be questioned by HMI on the way the school she was covering dealt with issues of non-attendance and punctuality. The school had been in special measures for eighteen months.

The EWO thought this would be an excellent opportunity to inform those in authority how staff were continually failing pupils who had approached them with issues of bullying from other pupils and teaching staff. The school did not want her to speak to the Ofsted inspector. The EWO sought the advice from a senior manager of the EWS and was told it was not appropriate to divulge subjective opinions and that if she had any concerns with the way the school dealt with complaints from pupils and their families they should be passed on to the named LEA representative for the school. The EWO felt that this interpretation of the role working both for the pupil in the family circumstances and for the school, was unsatisfactory, leaving the EWO caught between using his or her initiative for the benefit of the pupil and the family as against working towards the benefit of the school and the LEA.

5.6 Liaison, integration and links

According to one manager, links with other welfare services are generally seen as vital in the more challenging non-attendance cases. The following are services described by respondents that EWOs can typically call upon if needed:

> Social Work: social workers have a general knowledge as well as local experience of children and families at risk. They may know of specific family or financial circumstances, or may be able to suggest networks or forms of support for family or child. (Respondent 1.)

> Education Psychology Service: educational psychologists have long experience of diagnostic work and in some cases counselling with individual children and parents. Increasing emphasis is placed on psychologists working with schools and teachers, and dealing with day-to-day problems in the school and classroom. (Respondent 2.)

> Youth Offending Team: since the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Youth Offenders Team has a more informal relationship with young people and has knowledge of their lifestyle and interests outside school. They often work with truants who are considered to be at risk of offending in special centres or intermediate projects. (Respondent 3.)

> Voluntary organisations: support services can provide different kinds of support in different regions. For example, home visiting services for minority ethnic groups or for travelling people. (Respondent 4.)

> EWOs work closely with schools and families to resolve attendance issues, arranging school and home visits as necessary. Most services are led by a Principal Education Welfare Officer (DfEE, 1999: 18). Some LEAs operate their services from a central base responding to needs as they arise, others adopt a 'patch' approach where EWOs based at local offices serve a number of schools in a particular defined area, often one or more large secondary schools (DfEE, 1999: 18) and their feeder primaries. (Respondent 5.)

The EWOs interviewed commented on improving the reactions of other agencies involved in cases of truancy. They believed schools should become more involved perhaps by using money from the government to fund initiatives aimed at preventing truancy and improving attendance figures. It was felt by many EWOs that schools could and should do more to prevent problems arising in the first place, through pastoral care and improved teaching. The government was felt to be slow in such things as looking at alternative provision for Key Stage 4 curriculum.

One manager considered that it was the job of the EWO to confront schools with issues of bad practice rather than just resolving the non-attendance. EWOs were motivated to tackle these perceived failings by the school but they were of the opinion that they were insufficiently trained, confident and supported to do this, which was thus a problem. There are no general guidelines about the boundaries of the job in this respect.

EWOs had come up against lack of co-operation from schools when it was not in the interest of the school for a number of reasons to admit to having pupils who were unpunctual or absent. One school, which had serious attendance problems, was found by the EWO to have 32 pupils absent one day and with many more arriving late. The EWO asked this school to send letters to the parents but the school refused, as the Head did not want any formal record of the situation. This made it very difficult for the EWO to do her job.

It was described by one interviewee that increasingly referrals from the EWS to social service department are rejected unless legal proceedings are involved, on the grounds that non-attendance problems of whatever nature are the province of the EWS and do not form a priority for social service staff. Yet officers can be expected to take on the role and position of primary workers in multi-agency situations ranging from child abuse to less complicated family situations related to non-attendance.

The overlap between the EWO's work and that of child and family social services plus probation and youth offending teams is frequently not appreciated by other professionals. The EWO is looked upon by some parents, teachers and magistrates as an 'attendance officer' who can solve the attendance problem in isolation from the whole raft of difficulties usually accompanying it. The EWO's status in meetings with professionals from the other agencies and within schools does not help the situation.

5.7 Professional Status and Resources

The EWS works at the interface between school and the community trying to fulfil a difficult role of being an agent of social control on the one hand and that of a child-centred caring agency on the other. At the same time it has to work with increasing numbers of children and families.

5.7.1 Resources

As discussed earlier, the EWS has to perform its tasks without statutory recognition and within a system where competition for limited resources is at a premium (Halford, 1994: 9).

Resources to combat non-attendance such as setting up of group work, parent support and prevention strategies are sadly lacking in some EWSs, as are adequate training and development and career opportunities. Similarly, the service could be regarded as peripheral in a school setting so it could be regarded as such within the LEA as a whole.

The issue of safety when working with certain families was raised by an EWO. According to one EWO, this is partly a matter of insufficient resources. EWOs feel they have two specific safety problems. One, coping with violent families and two, driving pupils in their cars.

Most EWOs felt they were not treated as equals by schools and social services. The staff who did feel equal and were satisfied with their situation were mostly DipSW/CQSW qualified. They felt an outcome of this was that schools recognised their own responsibilities. Another was that the other agencies were more willing to work together with these EWOs on cases. This resulted in the EWO being able to manage their own work and take the time and resources to use their skills in this collaborative way.

5.7.2 Status

For the majority, however, the scenario outlined in the previous paragraph did not exist. Although on a personal level, professional relationships between colleagues within the EWS, schools and related agencies were positive, underlying issues often frustrated their potential.

In the school setting, over half the interviewees felt that they had an inferior status compared with the school staff. They were not part of decision-making and sidelined in

the management team. This the EWOs put down to their lack of qualifications and training leading to other agencies perceiving their inferior professional status.

One EWO commented:

> In a recent meeting with other professionals, including a hospital consultant, I was treated as an equal at the start but the moment I officially introduced myself as an EWO I felt I was dismissed. Even when we each gave our contribution to the meeting mine was cut short to five minutes while the others went on for as long as they liked.

A couple of interviewees felt that the LEAs were confused about their role. While management was often supportive and helpful, there was doubt about whether it was really behind the role and direction that EWOs were striving for. For example, several EWOs felt that there was perhaps a hidden agenda on the LEA's part, which was not being shared with staff. Interviewees expressed concerns that they may soon become school-based and de-professionalised. Repeatedly, interviewees emphasised the disadvantages of being a secondary service within a large LEA bureaucracy. At the same time they considered the LEAs as the appropriate location for a specialist service such as the EWS.

Too frequently the service was given an inferior role within the school and the network of support services, because to a large extent its officers were formally unqualified for the tasks they were expected to perform. To some officers this was particularly apparent during court hearings and case conferences when their contributions were given little credibility, yet they may have been heavily involved in the case in question.

Interviewees felt that they are seen as attendance officers wielding a big stick to enforce and punish rather than as problem-solvers balancing enforcement and support. It was felt there is a need for the development of a co-ordinated training programme, which will give officers a professional status on par with other professional agencies.

5.7.3 Negative perceptions of the job

> The emphasis is now on reducing unauthorised absence figures and meeting targets set by senior management. It is all about the service [EWS] being cost effective rather than supporting families. (EWO.)

There was some feeling that failure to be successful and resolve some cases was generally undermining EWO's morale. This could be something to do with individual officer's perception of their role, seeing it as an advocate role rather than as an enforcing one. One EWO said: '80% of EWOs' work is unskilled and could be conducted by an unqualified administrative officer.' Three officers felt that they possessed skills that were underused, being employed in only 20% of their daily routines. For example, one officer was a qualified family therapist but due to the everyday duties she was expected to perform i.e. register checks and consulting with school staff, she said she did not have the time to use her skills with the families who she know would benefit from it.

Data collected in this study indicates that an EWO's average working day is spent 'frequently' undertaking routine tasks e.g. register checks, writing letters and travelling to and from schools which could in fact be administered by an unqualified administrator and only 'occasionally' does the role of EWO require the practitioner to use his or her skills e.g. counselling, group work, implementing whole school approaches, training sessions for school staff or family therapy.

Currently, LEAs employ EWS staff to deliver its statutory duties with regard to school attendance but what would be more cost effective for the LEA is to concentrate EWS staff in areas of most need enabling them to use their skills to reduce absence rates. For example, use a rotating system for EWOs to cover one/two secondary schools for a limited period 'troubleshooting' attendance problems and then to move on to other schools. Also, to have EWOs whose main task is solely to check attendance data and contact parents with regard to their legal responsibility while other EWOs main task would be to work with the young person who is not attending with a view to re-engaging with the school.

In order to understand the reasons for negative perceptions of the service two questions were put to each of the interviewees. The first question put to respondents was 'what are the least attractive features of working within the EWS considered to be?' The responses to this were in order of importance given:

Pay
Working conditions i.e. EWO often not being equipped with the fundamental tools to do the job i.e. own room, desk, telephone and/or computer. This was a problem with school based EWOs where cramped office conditions were an issue with most interviewees.
Lack of status alongside other professionals.
Limited career structure.

The second question put to respondents was 'what do you consider the most attractive features of working within the EWS considered to be? The responses to this were in order of importance given:

Freedom of work
Flexibility
Autonomy
Preventative work, opportunities to be creative and pro-active were also valued.

In terms of least attractive features, pay ranked as the most frequently cited, mentioned by 95% of interviewees. Additionally, a number of key issues were raised by interviewees, which impact on their working practice such as the working conditions, lack of status and a limited career path. Many staff felt their service was understaffed and under-resourced. Some believed the service was still widely regarded as a lower-status profession. It was felt that having a recognised qualification would go some way towards addressing this, although some doubts were raised about the relevance of the DipSW for all aspects of the EWS work. Whilst there is no doubt that the major focus of the work is on attendance, the opportunities presented to be creative and pro-active with regard to non-attendance were valued. The most positive aspects of the job were the freedom and flexibility of the work and were mentioned by all interviewees (100%).

5.8 Qualification and training of the EWO

Chapter 4 gives the overall statistics on training received and perceptions of training, from respondents to the postal questionnaires. There was recognition that training was important, therefore using this information as a guide, interviewees were invited to discuss the relevance of qualifications and opportunities for EWS staff development.

A few years ago authorities would second their EWS staff to study for CQSW/DipSW but the world is changing from secondment and introducing a three-year degree, as

LEAs are no longer receiving funds for seconding. One authority taking part in this study recruited only qualified staff i.e. CQSW/DipSW. Others had none. Previous sections in this chapter have also highlighted the objections from EWOs and 'experts' to this nature of qualification. One manager expressed reservations about the relevance of the CQSW to the work. He went on to explain that whilst obtaining the qualification was thought to give practitioners confidence and allow them to consolidate theory behind their practice, he was concerned about the lack of a specific 'education welfare' module.

A major difference between social services and the EWS is the focus on education and hence on the school. So EWOs need to know about education and schools as well as about other involved agencies. A relevant qualification should therefore stress the educational side, as should the training that the LEAs provide. One senior manager commented 'what has happened in the past is that EWOs are seconded and qualify, then leave EWS for a better paid job perhaps with social services, therefore the [education welfare] service is not benefiting from the training of officer'.

5.9 Need for specialisation e.g. 'School Social Worker'.

For Unison it is a major achievement to get the DipSW recognised as basic qualification for EWOs. Unison worked for 5 years to get an increase in pay for officers. It should be of equal status to field social workers for all EWOs. Currently 70-80% of EWOs receive equal salary to social workers.

The DipSW qualification for officers was agreed by National Council for the Curriculum, Trade Unions, Unison, NASWE, Government including CCETSW and DfEE. However, according to one manager, a change to make it to degree level (a 3 year course as opposed to two) would equalise UK workers with those in continental Europe. Elsewhere in Europe Social Workers train for 3 years therefore can work in UK; however social workers from UK cannot work elsewhere in Europe (Unison and NASWE, 1998).

5.10 Summary

The study has shown up several issues, which may be preventing the Education Welfare Service (EWS) from achieving its potential; these include the lack of EWO training and sharing good practice. Fundamental to effective working in today's service is the structure and status of the service and its staff. Data have been produced which suggest constructive changes could be made here. On a day-to-day basis, we can propose from the survey results ways of improving staff effectiveness as well as job satisfaction.

EWOs have a primary duty to enforce attendance. However, the inclusion of 'welfare' (or 'social work' in some authorities) suggests another component to their work. This is an issue that interviewees raised, some felt that the LEAs were confused about the role of the EWO and were concerned that there is perhaps a 'hidden agenda' with regard to the future of the delivery of the service. The view of many interviewees was that the EWS has been given too low a status within education per se, both by some LEAs and by schools. The way forward, as they see it, is for the service to have a recognised qualification that would raise the status of the profession and in turn would improve career advancement opportunities.

This chapter has relayed the issues that prevail within the EWS regarding qualifications, training and resources. It was evident that the primary role of an EWO is to improve school attendance but what also became clear was that although the Education Welfare is not a failing service it is not doing as well as it can. Evidently, a range of strategies can be employed to boost attendance levels, influencing pupil attendance. However, what becomes equally clear is that necessary to effective working in today's conditions of meeting government targets is the structure and status of the service and its staff. EWS structure typically involved the allocation of casework teams on the basis of geographical areas.

We have seen that some EWOs are unclear about their role due to the duality of tasks that they are expected to undertake such as the enforcement of regular attendance and 'welfare' tasks e.g. advising and supporting families. Furthermore, we have highlighted a professional dichotomy within the service. This is apparent in the title of practitioners, the training and the techniques used to improve attendance. Data

indicates that this is partly due to the varied training backgrounds of EWOs e.g. some with academic or professional qualifications while in some cases, some were untrained. EWS staff had entered the profession from a wide range of professional backgrounds, in particular, from Social Services, education and youth work. What is evident, however, is that in some cases, EWOs are unqualified for the task they are asked to perform in schools. If the core activity of the EWS is education, then perhaps one approach to improving staff effectiveness would be to tackle non-attendance from an educational perspective rather than social work.

Data reported in this chapter clearly identified issues that are responsible for less than effective working, in particular the fact that many of the EWOs previously acquired professional skills are not being used to their full advantage as much of the officer's time is taken up with administrative tasks. Having examined the matters of EWS structure and status that interviewees reflected upon we can see there are problems within the service such as dichotomy between educational and social cultures and clarification of job role, but what we need to do in order to progress the service is to develop a good practice model that can be used as a benchmark for effectiveness. We can do this by identifying the strengths of the service and use them as the platform on which to build a new service. The following chapter focuses on the working practice of the EWO and goes on to discuss the initiatives that have been identified as examples of effective practice in working with the school non-attender.

Chapter 6: Establishing Effective Working Practice

6.1 Introduction

LEAs have a statutory duty to ensure children who are registered at school attend regularly. The LEA fulfils this requirement through the EWS, whose primary responsibility is to ensure the regular and punctual attendance of all pupils. The precise roles practised by EWOs tend to differ by LEA and by the school for whom they are responsible. It was evident that, whilst some EWOs interviewed for this study concentrated on 'welfare' issues, an overwhelming emphasis was placed by all EWOs on school attendance. 64 cases provided by 16 EWOs were discussed over a six-month period for this study. The aim was to establish a benchmarking procedure to measure effectiveness thus leading to improve consultation and evaluation of delivery of service. Each interviewee spoke about their own particular way of working and how they considered their role as an EWO. The starting point in all cases was a visit to the school to consult with staff on referrals.

The working practice and training of the EWO varies, depending on the individual local education authority's values and resources. Each LEA taking part in this study had a different policy for the deployment and priorities of their EWS, for example one LEA stipulated that part of the EWOs role was to support excluded pupils, another LEAs policy was for EWOs to assess for free school meals and clothing grants. Recent government guidelines (DfEE, 1999b) have re-emphasised that within the wide range of work the prime function of EWSs is still the enforcement of school attendance. It was apparent from data collected that the practice of EWSs varies to an unacceptable degree. This chapter focuses on the working practices of the Education Welfare Officers in the sample. In the previous two chapters the problem areas identified could broadly be grouped as the following:

- The majority of an EWOs work is around school and home visits with over 60% of their time being taken up with administrative duties. This implies there is not sufficient time to work one-to-one with non-attenders or to do the more specialised roles e.g. group work, counselling.
- Contrary to popular belief, the EWO actually works with the adult in the situation not the non-attender.

- EWOs are unclear about their role as there are no standardised practice guidelines.
- Training received is not reflecting the duties performed.

These problems are going to be addressed in this chapter with a view to identifying the strengths of the service. The following section concentrates on examples of practice where EWOs were working effectively to improve attendance. An assessment of practice will be conducted in order to identify a good practice model. Practice models have been defined from working in an evaluative way using interviewee responses as data source.

6.2 Interventions and Working Practices

6.2.1 Care versus control

Interventions to tackle truancy are many and varied, but may be divided into 'care' and 'control' functions. The use of the continuum of types has caused much confusion in the service, as expressed by one interviewee:

> I have been an EWO for years, back then there were no guidelines...you wandered into school, wandered round to the family. Now the service is more focused and structured. I still work and listen to families, in a social work style but with targets and reviews. I would say I work in a social work style balanced with statutory duties. EWO.

EWOs routinely visit homes and know, and are known to, persistent non-attenders. In the past the service has emphasised its role as welfare service but more recently, it is increasingly being encouraged to adopt a policing one (DfEE, 1999). Figure 10 (page 147) illustrates the division in delivery of EWS intervention; EWOs routinely adopt one of these approaches which they feel is appropriate to individual cases.

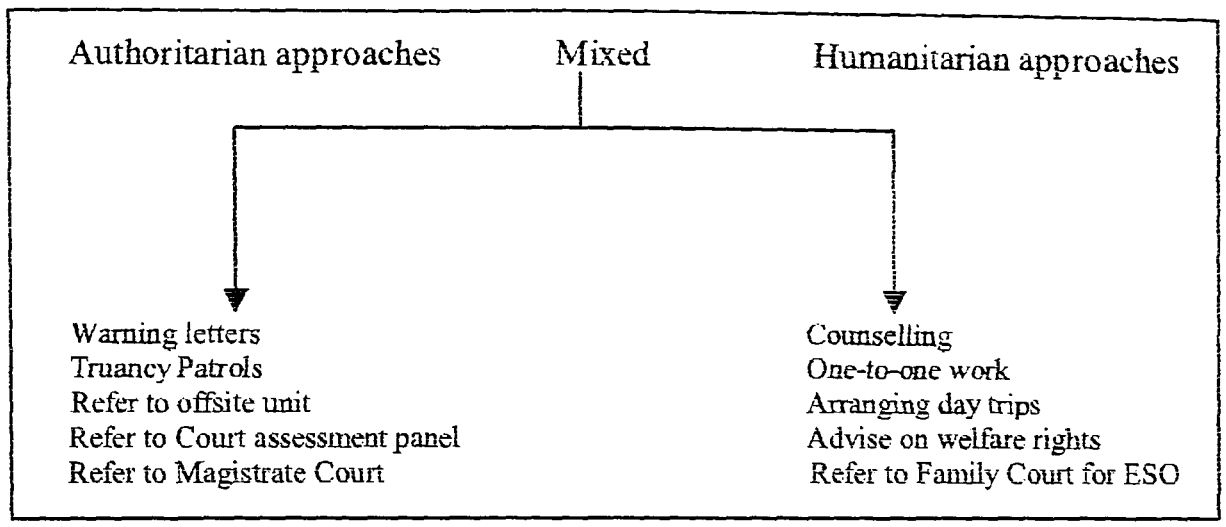


Figure 10: Spectrum of casework approaches

Wardhaugh (1990: 750) describes 'care' as measures which overtly at least, aim to bring about change in an individual or family through some type of provision for their material, emotional, psychological or social needs. She goes on to describe 'control' measures as those which attempt to effect change by means of the imposition of limits or controls on behaviour (Wardhaugh, 1990: 750). One interviewee commented that there is a need for empathy and an honest discussion of the realities and reactions to the non-attendance. She went on to say:

> I often to say to kids that I am working with that school may not be the best place for you but staying away will not solve the problem either. So, if it can't be changed, let's see how we can help you get the best out of what is available in the time you have left at school.

There was unanimous agreement among EWOs in this study that the education welfare service is primarily an agency within the education department of a LEA concerned to improve school attendance and combat non-attendance. Therefore EWOs would probably fully endorse the current view of the government expressed in Circular 10/99, that wherever possible LEAs focus on attendance initiatives which help children develop the habit of regular attendance; show parents clearly that unjustified absence will be noticed and challenged; and minimise problems in secondary schools by helping pupils transferring from primary schools (DfEE, 1999: 4).

6.2.2 Selecting the best interventions

The aim of this stage of the study was to explore the use of a number of methods of intervention, which appear to be practised unevenly throughout the EWSs. All EWOs who took part in the study considered themselves to be primary agents for intervention once non-attendance has been identified. Within the school setting intervention depends on the degree of co-operation with teaching staff and working in the home environment it depends on the level of co-operation with pupil and parents.

The data collected from the interviews has provided illustrations of various interventions and strategies. Interviewees were asked to identify one or two practices or projects that, in their view, were particularly innovative or effective in improving attendance. What now follows is a report of the different types of initiatives monitored by the researcher followed at the end of each description by a comment on effectiveness.

6.2.3 School-based initiatives

The objective of any school-based initiative should be to stop the problem of non-attendance reoccurring. In all school settings the teacher is at the forefront of detecting non-attending pupils but the responsibility for taking action to bring the pupil back to school varies considerably. In primary schools it tends to be the head teacher, whereas in secondary schools the task falls primarily on the Heads of Year and pastoral staff. There is much that school staff can, and should, do before involving EWOs in a particular case. For example, one interviewee had prepared and distributed to Heads of Year a 'pre-referral' form which indicated various interventions that she expected to be undertaken by the member of staff before she would 'take on' a referral (Figure 11, page 150).

Data from interviews has indicated that all participants stated that, prior to accepting a case, they looked for evidence that the school itself had made an effort to address the non-attendance. In general, government guidelines indicate that formal referral should take place if a pattern of irregular attendance is either continuing or worsening or

parents do not accept their responsibilities for ensuring their child attends school (DfEE, 1999: 19).

One of the advantages of EWOs regularly meeting with school staff is that it encourages practitioner integration into the processes and culture of each school. In this study EWOs met weekly or more frequently with school staff to identify non-attenders. In addition to the meetings each officer checked the school registers or in some cases asked for registration printouts from the computerised systems. It was clear that a combination of these methods appropriate to each school setting gave the most satisfactory results, in particular regular meetings with Year Heads was emphasised by over 50% of EWOs as good practice.

Generally, a close relationship with school staff was deemed essential, and in one school this idea was taken one step further by basing the EWO in the school. Other effective interventions in relation to working with schools included giving presentations on attendance, taking into account specific needs of schools and offering schools access to a duty EWO, who is always available on the end of a telephone, should any problems arise.

In two of the authorities school-based initiatives were considered by EWS staff to be 'very effective' and in some cases the impact on attendance difficult to quantify. However, one interviewee commented that by working more closely with school staff it enabled schools and the EWS to take a broad view of attendance problems.

Figure 11: Pre-referral form

Name of Pupil:
Form:

Form Teacher:
Head of Year:

	Date(s) Done	Written Details To EWO
• Form teacher discuss with pupil	.....	☐
• Head of Year discuss with pupil	.....	☐
• Form teacher contact parent/guardian to express concern (e.g. phone call; letter; discuss at parent's evening).	.....	☐
• Concerns and agreements in writing to parent/guardian	.....	☐
• Implementation of any appropriate in-school measures (e.g. *modified curriculum; change of lass; 'contact person' in school;* support in lessons etc.)	.....	☐
• Use of appropriate strategy/ies with pupil (e.g. attendance charts/on attendance report; incentives; rewards etc.)	.....	☐

The precise point at which school staff refer a case to the EWS seemed to be a matter of individual judgement e.g. within the terms of local protocol or service level agreement. Data from the 16 interviewees demonstrated that formal referral of cases took place if one or more of the following applied: a pattern of irregular attendance continued or worsened ('nine day fortnights' or blocks of absence); in some cases parents do not accept their responsibilities for ensuring the child attends school and refuse to discuss ways of improving attendance with the school; and/or condoned unjustified absence is increasingly a problem, or the parents ask for excessive amounts of authorised absence (as set out by government guidelines).

Some consideration must also be given to referrals made by parents. One interviewee reported that some parents, albeit a few, approach the EWS for help in finding ways to improve their child's school attendance. In these cases, EWOs become voluntarily involved in situations in which the home rather than the school becomes the focus for initial intervention.

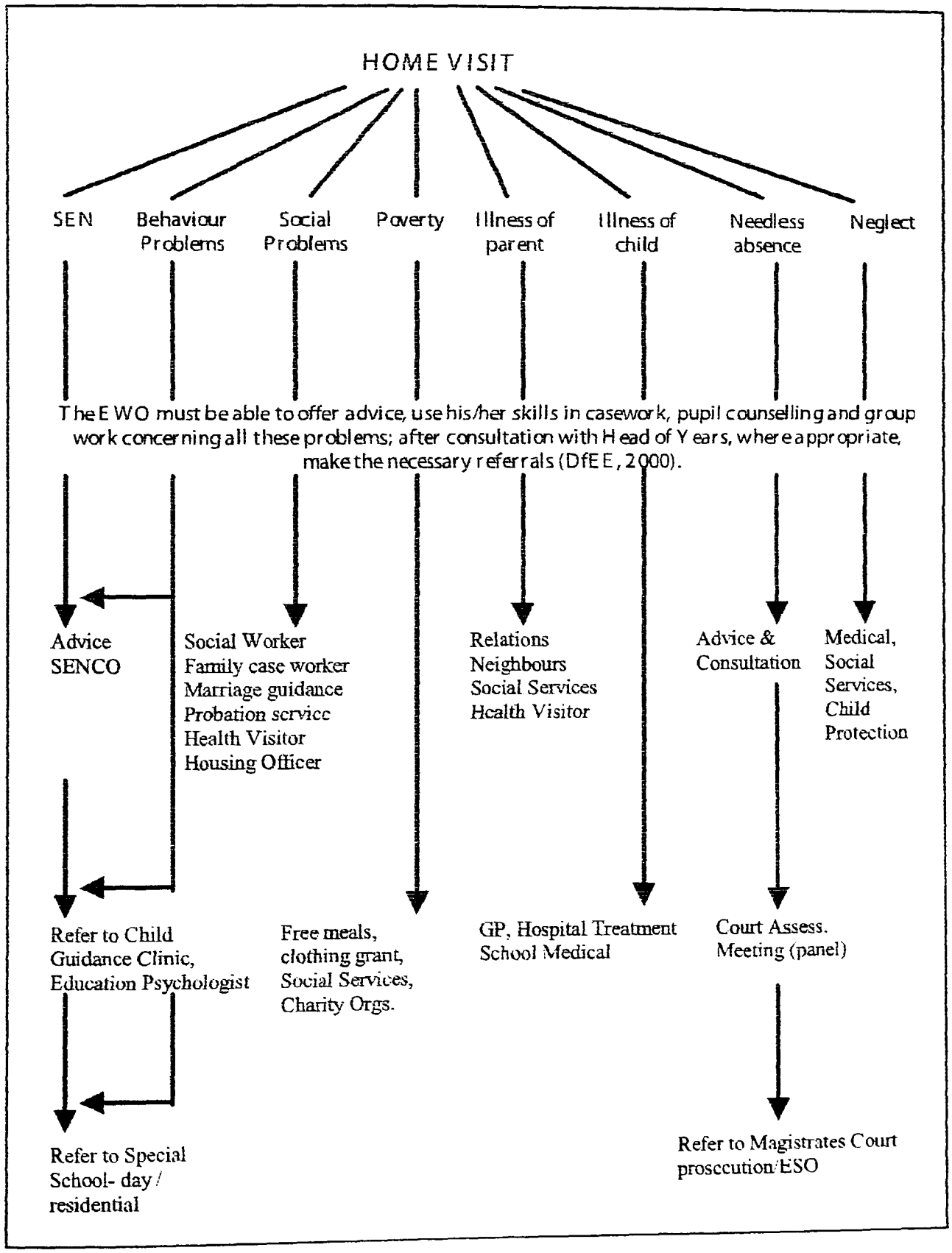
6.3 Individual case studies of intervention

The following section illustrates a sample of methods of intervention used to help the EWS meet its objectives and considered to be 'good practice' as measured against Reid's (1992) task centred model (described in section 3.6.5). The intention was to determine the EWOs most common and effective choices of interventions by questioning officers on professional judgments about the families and young people under review; methods of issues of child-centred versus traditionalist approaches; the number of Education Supervision Orders worked with and number of prosecutions; whether EWOs see their work in terms of failure (i.e., punitive method); and whether EWOs see the courts as an ultimate resource in certain cases. However, only two EWOs observed in this study actually showed evidence of planning an intervention programme. The records of the eight cases submitted by these two officers clearly showed an assessment and goal-setting phase, a task planning and a final problem review phase. One of the advantages of such planning enabled anyone who read the file i.e. supervisor, Head of Service, another EWO, to establish the progress of the case. It was noted the officers were social work trained.

Each EWO interviewed regarded the specified methods of intervention as effective tools in dealing with non-attendance. To illustrate each intervention an example of good practice, recorded during the study, is reported in sections 6.3.2-6 as well as comments from subjects regarding their thoughts on choices of intervention used to help the EWS meet its objectives: getting children to school; whether these be sociological or psychological approaches; and assessment process.

The effective analysis of non-attendance situations was regarded as an essential skill in all discussions. Many commented that despite years of experience they could be overwhelmed by the many facts that have to be assessed and prioritised, and finally formulated as a basis for action. In an attempt to structure this complexity responses from interviewees referring to their assessment of cases are summarised in Figure 12 (page 152) and has been used as a basis for development of a 'decision tree'.

Figure 12: 'Decision Tree'



For most the assessment process was learnt 'on the job', which left many feeling uneasy and lacking in theoretical and informational resources when solutions to problems were sought. It was noted early in the interviews that not one of the interviewees had a structured approach to the initial assessment. Most commented that the selection of an appropriate area of intervention was very much the individual officer's decision and all commented that they would welcome more opportunity for developing the relevant skills based upon greater knowledge of concepts of need and of resources available for appropriate action.

This study found no evidence of a structured approach to assessment amongst the EWOs taking part. Evidence from interviews of United States School Social Workers (SSWs) showed that SSWs are the link between home, school and community. In contrast to EWOs all SSWs are educated to Masters' degree level and are school based. As members of the educational team comprised of teachers, administrators, pupil services staff and parents, school social workers promote and support students' academic and social success by providing specialised services that include individual and group counselling, support groups for students and parents, crisis prevention and intervention, home visits, social-developmental assessments, parent education training, professional case management and advocacy for students, parents and the school system (Glenn, 2000: 10).

Members are trained to conduct a full assessment of pupils referred to them and use the 'Forty Developmental Assets' (Search Institute 2000, appendix E: 266) framework to do so. Reportedly all SSWs use the forty developmental assets framework to interview parents and students and find this a useful tool as it allows a full picture of the student's life to be completed and worked from. The framework is considered in detail below.

6.3.1 Example frameworks

In an effort to identify the elements of a strength-based approach to healthy development, the Search Institute (Search Institute Organisation, 2000) developed the framework of developmental assets. This framework identifies forty critical factors for young people's growth and development. When drawn together the assets offer a set of

benchmarks for positive child and adolescent development. This is a form-filling task and is usually completed during a meeting with parents.

The assets clearly show important roles that families, schools, neighbourhoods, youth organisations and others in communities play in shaping young people's lives. The first 20 developmental assets focus on positive experiences that young people receive from the people and institutions in their lives. Four categories of external assets are included in the framework: support; empowerment; boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time.

According to the Search Institute (2000: 2) a community's responsibility for its young does not end with the provision of external assets. There needs to be a similar commitment to nurturing the internal qualities that guide choices and create a sense of centredness, purpose and focus. Four categories of internal assets are included in the framework: commitment to learning; positive values; social competencies and positive identity.

Marian Huxtable, a school social worker in USA for over 25 years, agreed to be interviewed for this study. She described how she used the 'forty developmental assets' framework in her daily practice and, in addition, she had developed what she described as the 'resiliency' model in order to prevent problems. She defines resiliency as the ability to recover from stress or adverse circumstances and to develop social and academic skills in spite of them. What fascinates her is the qualities and life experiences of people who were successful in spite of severe stress and adverse circumstances in their lives.

Huxtable (2000: 3) found that there were protective factors that prevented the children from developing problems. These factors are divided into external and internal factors as described above. Some of these factors are innate qualities that people have from an early age; other factors such as support and empowerment can be provided and developed at school. Huxtable concluded:

> Our job as school social workers is to help schools build these protective factors into the children's school lives. We can also attempt to instill those protective factors that seem to be inherent in some children. For example, the protective

> factor of being out-going and seeking attention is something we can encourage in all children. (Huxtable, 2000.)

Each case requires skilled work to unravel the problems around the non-attendance. These frequently involve overlapping troubles relating to the parents, family or extended family and manipulation of the facts. The EWO must be able to sort out what is going on, which are legitimate areas for intervention and set a programme for tackling these.

An EWO described a case she was currently working with where a primary age pupil is not attending because the mother is suffering with depression and finds it difficult to get the child to school. The father works a very early shift and is unable to take the child but the parents are giving excuses to the school that the child is ill and unable to attend. The mother will not accept medical help for her condition and the EWO has the task of persuading her to attend a counselling session. At the same time the EWO has to encourage the parents to ensure that the child attends school regularly by involving members of the family or by referring to Social Services.

6.3.2 Intervention 1: Whole school policy

A further intervention framework is the whole school policy. Schools are now being encouraged to implement their own Whole School Attendance Policy with the intention of informing pupils and parents of the way in which the school will work with them to encourage good attendance. It is hoped by the EWS managers that the value placed on working partnerships with parent, pupil and school will ensure optimum attendance and thereby the best possible educational experience for the pupil. The whole school approach involves the whole school community i.e. pupils, teaching staff, auxiliary staff and in attendance-related issues.

The situation now can be far from this:

> Members of staff dealing with attendance, punctuality, pastoral, curriculum and special educational needs do not liaise. There is a willingness to work with some kids more than others, incorrect information is given for statements and strategies suggested are not put in place. (EWO.)

A day was spent with a Senior EWO and her team of School Attendance Development Officers in a school with a record of poor attendance. The school's allocated EWO was present but was not part of the team's plan of intervention (it must have felt pretty undermining to the EWO to have your work scrutinised by a team of 4 trouble-shooters!).

The team spent the morning checking the registers and talking to school staff in order to design strategies of intervention. The Senior EWO presented an assembly to Year 9. She used very forceful words to get her point across about the importance of regular attendance. For instance 'you will be missed', 'truancy and non-attendance is at the forefront of all government education drives', also 'we value you', 'we believe in you and your potential' and 'you must protect your right to education'. She stressed that she was looking forward to working with them to improve punctuality and attendance at the school. The points covered in the assembly were:

Good attendance is linked to achievements - the more you are here the better you will do.

Attendance and punctuality are a legal requirement - penalty up to £2500 per parent plus costs.

Crime and Disorder Act will bring parenting orders, curfew orders and gives the police powers to pick up truants.

First day contact -expectation that parent/carer will phone or contact the school on first day of absence if not the school will contact parent/carer.

If you are not here you will be missed/ all absences will be challenged.

Authorised/unauthorised absences.

Introduction of pagers to parents of chronic truants in order to keep in touch.

Rewards for good and most improved attendance.

If you have a problem that is affecting your attendance please come and talk to a member of the team.

The Senior EWO explained that as far as she was concerned, good attendance is not just about academic achievement, important as that is. Good attendance is at the very heart of the concept of social inclusion. She believes in the whole school approach and wrote a book to be used as a guideline for the approach by schools and EWOs. It

requires commitment from all staff employed within the school, governors, parents, pupils and the community in which the school is located. It is about giving issues of attendance priority amongst the many other pressures and challenges. The whole school approach to attendance relates attendance to a wide range of other school issues including punctuality, rewards and incentives, re-integration of long-term absentees, curricular differentiation, home-school links, and the role of the EWS. This should be incorporated into the school development plan.

An excellent example of the whole school approach was reported by an EWO working for an Inner London Authority. He provided EWS cover to the school from 1993 when it was declared to be in special measures by HMI Inspectors. One of the main concerns being poor attendance – the overall attendance rate for the school was officially 84%, although unofficially the EWO said it was more like 74%. Figures were shown to prove how over the following five years, by using various interventions, the overall attendance rate improved to 98.5%. He explained that when he joined the school it had developed a culture of non-attendance and his intentions were to 'smash the culture with a high investment of energy and to target Year 7 pupils'. In the first year all referrals were taken up and in total 13 families were prosecuted for non-attendance. As the message filtered through the school that poor attendance would not be tolerated, the number of prosecutions decreased each year – 11 the following year then 4 and 2 in the academic year 1998-99.

Most of the interventions carried out appeared to be school-based administrative tasks e.g. letter writing and telephone calls along with negotiating with tutors on issues of curriculum problems. The EWO agreed that his working practice style was more along the lines of the traditional EWO and he could see no benefits for the school as a whole if he concentrated on the minority of hard-core non-attenders working with the families one-to-one. He felt the main effective strategies to be:

> Working with the whole school not just the hard-core non-attenders. Targeting Year 7s. 'Swamping' parents with information about school attendance policy i.e. zero tolerance. Inviting 200 parents into school for a meeting with EWO and school staff of which 100 attended. 'Churning out endless standard letters' sent to parents of those children achieving 80% attendance and under. Warning letters sent to parents informing them of implications of continued non-attendance - 45 were

> sent at one time culminating in the school switchboard being jammed from angry parents. Encouraging tutors to do pre-referral work. Telephone calls to and from parents regarding attendance and bullying issues and receiving support from school staff on cases to be referred for prosecution.
>
> I definitely contributed to turning the schools attendance rate around and to them coming out of special measures. The main reason for this was that I kept my word...if a letter was sent and there was no improvement I took the next step towards prosecution. There were 13 prosecutions in the first year and parents soon became aware that poor attendance would not be tolerated. (EWO.)

Three EWOs interviewed discussed their views on the effectiveness of this initiative. The aim was to raise awareness of attendance issues in the community and to develop effective school systems for dealing with absence and providing pupils with incentives to attend school. EWS respondents considered that the whole school approach made more use of EWS resources, provided a range of interventions and highlighted underlying problems that resulted in poor attendance.

6.3.3 Intervention 2: The use of group work with pupils and parents

There are several commonly employed interventions that require considerable levels of skill to be practised successfully. Group work is one of these. It uses minimal resources and is a practical approach. The skills required are similar to those employed by social workers, and it has already been noted that the skill levels of EWOs are very variable. Therefore some EWOs may not have been trained to sufficient levels to provide this intervention. However, during this study 18% of the questionnaire sample said they had conducted group work in their schools.

The researcher was able to participate in one such course together with the EWO. It was a 6 week course taking place on a Thursday afternoon between 1.45 p.m. and 2.45 p.m.

The group was loosely based on the creation of a Circle of Friends (often used in schools by counsellors and teachers). The aim of the group was to create a support network for the child from the immediate peer group and to develop skills in listening and taking turns. A further aim was to develop the ability to express thoughts and

feelings and to assure confidentiality amongst group members. This in turn should help the child make friends (McNamara and Moreton, 1995: 41).

The rationale behind using the Circle approach is that children with difficult and distressing behaviour frequently become isolated from their peer group and have difficulty in forming friendships. A cycle then develops where feeling excluded and set apart from others leads to behaving in more antisocial ways, which behaviour then maintains this sense of exclusion from others. By attending a group it is expected that the pupils who are in this cycle will break this pattern and will learn to feel and behave in different ways. Members of the group will achieve a new sense of belonging and acceptance and in turn improve the child's self-image and behaviour.

The purpose of the group was to address pupil difficulties and to look at personal social/issues. The focus was on behaviour problems with an aim to reintegrate children socially and improve school attendance. Pupils were recommended for the group if they had attendance, friendship and/or behavioural difficulties. Ten primary school pupils participated and two of those pupils were there as role models for other pupils. The education welfare service was actively involved with six group members and was monitoring the attendance of another two.

The aim was to motivate and support these pupils for six weeks. It was clear from the start that the behaviour of four pupils was alienating them from other pupils and made it difficult for them to make friends. Some group members found this behaviour entertaining but remained distant from them, and others found the disruptions irritating. It was hoped that the meetings would allow the members to express in a safe environment their thoughts and feelings regarding their problems (friendship groups was raised as problem).

Group Programme:

Session 1 – Introduction

Ground rules were explained which included listening to each other and let one person speak at a time. It was explained to members how important it was to respect each other's thoughts and feelings and not to ridicule or criticise others, even if they seem

odd to you. The members collectively decided a name for the group (Funky Group). Reasons for confidentiality were discussed.

Sessions 2-5 – circle time. Each session was the same - completing a work sheet regarding feelings, followed by each giving a positive and negative feeling explanation. Two games ended each session: 'Murder/detective' and 'I went to the North Pole'. The session finished with a circle - holding hands and saying goodbye to the person standing next to you.

Session 6 final session. After six weeks of weekly meetings the Funky group was coming to an end. Each member given a word on a piece of card that describes them e.g. lively, enthusiastic, vivacious, charming. Again the group was encouraged to do work sheets and played two games. The Head Teacher attended this last session for ten minutes. Group members were encouraged to say something good about each other. The EWO's role at these sessions was to help the children stay focused and to encourage all to contribute during discussions. The author of this study played an active role as a group member.

Particular concerns were noted regarding the encouragement of group members to talk about their feelings. The EWO would then encourage them to expand if they were expressing a negative feeling e.g. Child A 'I feel ugly today' or 'I feel like killing myself' (obviously playing to the group); it would have been more appropriate to talk to particular pupils after the group as it would be difficult to describe what was going on outside of school to the whole group. Members were told at the start of the sessions that they share only what they wanted to share with the group.

The climate within the group was non-judgemental and the EWO was as good as her word when she said that she would not tell the teachers of any bad behaviour. The expectation was that the group would behave. In reality the members were very disruptive e.g. lying on the floor; boys often fighting each other; girls refusing to participate.

The group was created for pupils who are experiencing difficulties with school life. Group members were better behaved at the start of the sessions (week 1) and appeared to find attending the group boring and therefore started to misbehave. To me it was not clear if the circle of friends approach achieved its aims. For example, other than members being excited when presented with their descriptive words, advantages were not obvious during group time. However, the head teacher joined us on the last session and reported that the class teacher had noticed improvements in each of the eight group members who were referred for behaviour and/or and requested another circle group session for other pupils at a later date.

The aim of the group was to 'improve behaviour'. As the focus of the child's behaviour changes (as was the aim of the group) the less disruptive they would be but it appeared to be the other way round with this group as boredom set in. This is supposed to be an inclusive approach offering support and encouragement but it appeared that these pupils having attended for six sessions were no better equipped to change their behaviour than when they first attended. However, there is potential in the approach and with some adjustment could have a greater impact. A report was made following the last group session and the researcher made recommendations for future group sessions:

> Each session would benefit from each member giving an update since last meeting (encouraging listening from other members and possibly one question).
>
> Review the good things about the past week.
>
> Discuss any difficulties during the past week e.g. arguments with friend/s.
>
> Group discussion of strategies to follow regarding problems experienced.
>
> At the final session give each member the opportunity to reflect on being involved and what have they gained from their experience (not much I would say).
>
> Important for the facilitator to maintain boundaries and keep the discussions feeling safe e.g. one member continually made unkind comments to another member and it was not long before others joined in, making the child feel very unhappy. (Holmes, 1998: 3).

Group work is a valuable resource to use when working with non-attenders but in this particular case the facilitator permitted the ground rules to be broken, and pupils were

not required to listen to and respect each other. Those who broke the rules were rewarded for doing so with attention and with seeing the desired effect on others, which strengthened their disruptive style. Participants were wary in session one until they knew what the underlying agenda might be but then gained confidence with further sessions and exploited them.

Three interviewees had used this intervention. One intervention took place after school, one evening a week for two hours over a six-week period. An EWO, Youth Worker and Police Officer facilitated it. Participants were invited who all had medium to high levels of authorised and unauthorised absence. Of this group, the attendance of five of the eight participants 'improved dramatically' and individual improvements, e.g. from 30 to 100 per cent attendance were noted. This intervention focuses on disaffected, vulnerable and pupils at risk of exclusion and is an attempt to equip pupils with coping strategies as well as raise self-esteem and confidence. It is an education-focused intervention and as one interviewee commented 'it is not suited to those practitioners who would rather focus on the cause of non-attendance than a symptom'.

One EWO who organised group work interventions commented that she felt it had a greater impact than individual intervention and considered it to be more cost effective because more pupils could be reached. Overall, EWOs who had been involved in group work interventions agreed that school attendance had been improved during the period the pupils attended the sessions and for the continuation of the school term but statistics were not available to calculate any improvements for the school year, indeed for the following years.

The attendance figures gathered during and after the group work programme observed in this study would certainly support this. The improvement of attendance ranged from 10-30% for the eight group members who had previously experienced problems and more significantly, they continued to maintain their attendance around the 85% mark for the rest of the school term with no EWS intervention. One of the reasons for the success of this group work could be attributed to the fact that the pupils were primary age thus providing clear evidence that the earlier the interventions take place in attendance cases, and the younger the pupil, the greater chance of success.

6.3.4 Intervention 3: First day response to absence

One of the single most effective initiatives designed to improve school attendance is contact on first day of absence (DfEE, 1999a). First day response is an integral part of the 'whole school attendance policy' and is one approach that is strongly recommended by the government (DfEE, 1999a: 19). Independent research (Ofsted, 1995a) shows clearly that if pupils know that their absence will be noted and acted upon swiftly they are more reluctant to absent themselves.

First day contact sends a clear message to pupils and parents that attendance is very important. This intervention was implemented in several schools in only one EWS and attendance was improved by up to 10% in some schools. The EWO who undertook this initiative recognised that this approach was time-consuming, she considered it to be effective as it enabled her to 'establish relationships with families of pupils with poor attendance who would not normally come into school'.

For it to be successful, the system must emphasise the responsibility of parents to inform the school of reasons for absence. Parents need to be aware of what is expected of them and challenged if they fail to inform the school of the reasons for absence, or if the reasons given for the absence are unacceptable. The procedure is most effective if it is applied to every unexplained absence and gives a clear message that absences are not allowed for reasons other than those determined by law. It was found that the telephone is the preferred method of contact as letters arrive too late and can be intercepted. Letters do not demand an instant response and quickly lose their effect.

Non-attenders who respond to the one-off warning letter or home visit, in the experience of the interviewees, form the minority of the EWOs caseload. The majority present an amalgam of the factors cited in Chapter 1. Schools, education authorities, social services, magistrates and other professionals to whom frequently non-attendance problems come low in their scale of priorities, have been slow to recognise their complexities. Only too often it is the EWO who is left to deal with the situation. Gradually, with research carried out by Atkinson et al. (2000a), Halford (1994), Audit Commission (1999) and others, more information is available about the causes and

effective intervention and possible developments of strategies. Causes of non-attendance do not remain static. Recent societal and economic changes have added to those already mentioned. Youth unemployment has seriously contributed to non-attendance in Year 11 of schooling. Disillusionment about employment prospects set in well before the leaving date has come and in the eyes of these young people, school has little to offer to counteract this - so why bother to go to school?

Of all the interventions observed in this study this was considered by the EWO to be the most singularly effective piece of work. In terms of measurement, this intervention improved attendance figures by up to ten per cent in two weeks, for example, from 80% for the previous four weeks attendance to 90% overall for six weeks (including previous four weeks). First-day response was also reported by an interviewee as raising the awareness of parents regarding their children who were truanting and made schools more accountable and aware of attendance issues.

6.3.5 Intervention 4: The Use of Court - Prosecution as a chosen intervention

The use of education supervision orders (ESOs) or prosecution is a controversial issue but one interviewee identified an initiative where these strategies were used effectively to support pupils and their families. Where ESOs were being used with primary pupils and those lower down the secondary age range, they were reported to be very effective at getting some pupils back into school, because parents tended to be more cooperative. The EWO explained that the intention of the use of prosecution, on the other hand, was to effect attitudinal-change, although another interviewee considered the threat of prosecution to be a deterrent to many parents.

According to one manager (1994) the EWS he covers prosecutes an average of 50 cases each year from about 100,000 children. This would seem a relatively low number of prosecutions, which raises the question of whether the LEA is actually doing a good job without resorting to the courts. Unfortunately, little research exists that addresses the effects of such prosecutions, including what happens after the court case and whether attendance improves.

The manager of this particular EWS went on to question whether the prosecution procedure indicates the EWS is getting tough on education, or whether the EWS is improving attendance. He felt the decision 'to prosecute or not' should not be determined by individual EWOs. Some officers go to court every Monday; some have never been in ten years of service. The way in future, with clearer criteria, will be a formal meeting with a Senior EWO. Only at that meeting can prosecution be authorised.

No one can say for sure, the manager explained, when it is appropriate to prosecute or to apply for ESO, as no nationally agreed criterion exists. Nor is there an official definition of when absenteeism becomes unacceptable. Some believe that EWOs should prosecute more, even though no evidence is available to prove this works. Prosecutions are very time consuming – time that could be better spent in other endeavours, such as group work with Year 7 students.

Most officers have allocated units to schools; on average most schools receive 4-5 hours of EWO each week. In that case you could spend the whole time on one case - a morning in court for instance. More parents could be prosecuted but at the expense of what? It is the officer who decides how to spend their allocated time at school. Also, different courts operate in different ways. The manager's role included advising on court procedures/training. In short, this manager was adamant that the EWS continually monitor and evaluate its procedures and outcomes, suggesting minimal improvement is taking place at this time.

Prosecution was not seen as a practical intervention by at least one EWO from each authority participating in this study. There was more than one reason for this view, as the following quotes from interviewees demonstrate:

> I am very reluctant to prosecute because of work involved. I don't like going to court because a) I feel I am not professionally trained to present a case: b) I am not familiar with court procedure and c)I cannot understand the questions asked let alone answer questions from Clerk of the Court, etc. I feel this then reflects badly on the service and word gets round in the community that the EWS representative is incompetent.

> I am not convinced that prosecuting parents or applying for an education supervision order works, for example a very streetwise Year 8 pupil sat with his parents before the family court, the magistrate treated him like a 3 year old, i.e., be good for mummy and go to school. I don't think magistrates or their clerks treat school attendance cases seriously. It is very rare to for parents to get the maximum fine.

There is a connection between several issues here: confusion over who is the client; what role in the service is most important; and the provision of adequate training and supervision. One EWO said that she previously resisted prosecuting families because she was trying to help the family. However, with experience, she believes that this only added to their problems from the child leaving school with no qualifications. These issues will be developed further in the final chapter.

Analysis of data indicated 12 of the EWOs interviewed realised the need and responsibility to use the courts. Effective and professional use of court is only possible in the context of accurate assessment and the formulation of appropriate intervention programmes. The EWO is more likely to obtain the co-operation and support of the court when s/he has a precise objective in mind, that being a conditional discharge or an Education Supervision Order (ESO), rather than using the Court as a last resort or a mechanism for passing the case on to other agencies.

From the 64 cases monitored over a six-month period (Table 7: 172-3) only 6 cases, around 9%, were referred to the Courts for prosecution. Five cases were referred for an ESO. Statistics produced in 1995 relating to the number of parental prosecutions initiated by LEAs suggest a less-than-straightforward relationship between LEAs' prosecution and unauthorised absences rates (DfEE, 1995a; Blyth & Milner, 1997: 81). They provided evidence of increased parental prosecution that rose by nearly a third, between 1991-2. They also show that some LEAs are able to produce low overall rates of unauthorised absence without recourse to legal action at all.

Interviewees were asked under what circumstances they would initiate legal procedures. 75% commented in one or more of the following closely related ways:

> The use of Magistrates Court is perceived as appropriate if the legal route would help both pupil and parents, alternative methods are failing to stop the pupil's serious loss of educational

opportunity, all other methods of intervention on the part of the EWO have failed and no further options remain and an application to the Family Court for an ESO is considered inappropriate as the parents refuse to co-operate with the EWO.

Alternatively, the use of Magistrates Court is perceived as not appropriate if the result is an inappropriate fine on the parents. If it is too little or too much in relation to their resources this does not help their attitude. It may then undermine the ongoing relationship with the EWO and not help non-attendance at all. Prosecution was deemed to be inappropriate if Court is used as a threat. This is unlikely to produce cooperation and solve the problems. Also, if the threat of prosecution is used before an investigation of the pupil's whole circumstances and surroundings at school and outside school it is ineffectual. Finally, pupils who fail to attend during the last year at school (Year 11) are less likely to be referred to the Courts.

Of the remaining 25% of interviewees, one did not answer the questions, while three expressed dissatisfaction with court proceedings. The latter group felt that administrative processes often delayed court action thereby allowing situations to escalate to an unnecessarily serious degree, yet the interim period demanded a high input of time for the EWO with little effective outcome. When asked about the use of ESOs over 50% replied that they could see no benefits in making an application to the courts for an ESO as one EWO commented 'there is so much paperwork involved in preparing the case for court and besides, the aim of the order is assist, advise and befriend the pupil and their family when it is likely that I have been doing exactly that for the past six months with no progress – why would a court order make any difference?'

As each EWO still uses his or her own rule of thumb about what action is appropriate for each type of case, not surprisingly practice varies tremendously between different local authorities, but no data has been available to date to establish relative merits of one system over another. Therefore data collected in this study suggested that

traditional 'policing' methods are still employed as indicated by the number of court cases processed. In contrast attempts at a social work approach are now being blocked and suppressed with the result that one EWO who had agreed to take part in the study left the service to work in another agency 'offering more scope and better prospects'.

Overall court proceedings were seen as a last resort, by some even as a sign of failure. On the one hand court proceedings could undermine already established relationships between EWO, pupil and parent, and make it difficult to strike an effective balance between care and control; on the other, particularly if Magistrates show understanding concern during proceedings, the EWO's relationship with the pupil and family could be supported and strengthened enabling a successful return to school.

6.3.6 Other effective interventions

In addition to the interventions described in sections 6.3.2-6.3.5 a wide range of practices was identified in this study as effective practice. In total, 20 different interventions were discussed and recorded; however not all were monitored by the researcher. Therefore, interviewees were asked to describe and elaborate on the nature of the intervention, the agencies involved, pupils targeted, and the effectiveness of the initiative. They were coded and categorised into the following types:

Type 1 – integration programme for long-term absentees: twelve of the sixteen interviewees mentioned this intervention when discussing their cases. It was the most mentioned intervention as it was used for pupils of all ages. The EWO would discus with the school the possibility of a reduced timetable for a period of time in order for the pupil to re-establish him/herself with their peers and would also ensure there was support for the pupil from a member of staff. This was a short-term strategy with review dates set.

Type 2 – intitiatives aimed at disaffected pupils: these initiatives focused on providing intervention for pupils often described by interviewees as 'disaffected', those with long term attendance problems and usually associated difficulties, such as emotional, social and behavioural problems.

Type 3 – alternative curriculum approaches e.g. reduced timetable and in one LEA an EWO referred the pupil to the accredited Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Type 4 – changing the culture of the whole school community: two interviewees described this practice as being effective in a school with attendance problems. It appears the aim of this initiative is to ensure that all parents and school staff including ancillary workers are committed to improving attendance.

Type 5 – alternative education e.g. college placement or extended work experience: this initiative was described by ten of the sixteen interviewees as being the most single effective strategy. This intervention offers pupils access to an alternative curriculum, usually in conjunction with local colleges and training providers. Typically, this involved college placement, in the form of vocational courses.

Type 6 – collection of attendance data in order to evaluate effectiveness: one interviewee described this initiative and considered it to be very successful. The EWO conducted an audit of the schools system and procedure for recording attendance. Following the audit, the EWO made recommendations to the school on how to address the weaknesses. Firstly, joint working was recommended including home visits and truancy sweeps, by EWOs and teachers, or other relevant professionals. This was considered effective by four interviewees who stated they regularly conducted joint visits with teachers or social workers to the homes of non-attenders. A second recommendation was the setting up of truancy sweeps. One interviewee described how she often would visit with the local community Police Officer known haunts of truants. Two interviewees described their participation in truancy sweeps working with the local police. The final recommendation made to the school in order to improve attendance was the suggestion of initiating case conferences to discuss relevant issues with professionals involved. This particular initiative was identified as effective practice by five of the interviewees. Multi-agency or multi-professional panels were convened for discussion and making decisions with regard to the most appropriate provision for pupils with chronic attendance problems.

6.4 Case Monitoring

Interestingly, only one of the 16 interviewed spoke about the whole school approach and improving the overall school attendance. In every other case the EWO spoke of individual cases and how they were working with the child and family to effect a change. In one authority there were guidelines as to the length of time a case should remain open. One interviewee from this authority commented on the successful way in which monitoring of cases was used to manage the volume of work, if no improvement was evidenced, the case would proceed on to the next stage, finally to court action. An example of how a case is moved on is provided in table 6 below (name changed to protect identity):

Table 6: Case Study

Danny Smith (Year 10)

Danny's attendance had always been poor since the end of Year 9 but had managed to avoid formal intervention until the beginning of Year 10. He refused to return to school following the autumn half-term break. The case was referred to the EWO who arranged to visit Danny and his mother at home. Mrs Smith cancelled two appointments. Danny did not return to school and last attended 10 weeks ago. The EWO decided to visit unannounced. She spoke to Mrs Smith (Dad had left the family home some time ago) and Danny who had apparently been suffering with tonsillitis, 'you can check with our doctor, if you don't believe us' was Mrs Smith's response. The EWO did follow this up with the GP and was told that Danny had had tonsillitis but that his illness did not justify the level of non-attendance.
The EWO called a pre-court meeting in school with Mrs Smith, Danny and his head of year present. Danny had now been out of school for 14 weeks. He explained he had been bullied by other pupils and by some teachers who kept making references to Danny's older brother who had poor attendance. A re-integration programme was decided and Danny agreed to return to school the next day. The programme was to be monitored by the EWO for four weeks.
Danny attended two days and did not return. Several attempts were made to contact Mrs Smith but there was no response. The case was discussed during supervision and the EWO was advised to refer to the Magistrates Court for a hearing date. The case was heard; Mrs Smith pleaded guilty and fined £50 plus costs of £35. Danny had not attended school regularly for eighteen weeks.
Danny did not return to school. Attempts were made to contact Mrs Smith but it appeared that she had moved house. The EWO contacted the housing department who informed her that the family still resided at that address. It was now 24 weeks since Danny had regularly attended school. The EWO referred the case back to the Magistrates Court. Mrs Smith did not attend and was fined £50 in her absence. The case was referred to the Children Out of School Panel with a view to offering Danny an alternative education programme but Mrs Smith still refused to co-operate with education officials.

Each respondent in the study could see no point in referring families to court for non-attendance as in the majority of cases the fines are so little – 33% of interviewees inferred it was not worth the time and effort of the paperwork involved when families receive a minimum fine, and as the above case illustrates EWOs try to engage with the

family but without the co-operation of the parents and pupil the task is pointless, especially as in a small percentage of cases, some parents are not bothered by the threat of a fine. Over 50% of EWOs interviewed expressed the sentiment that they felt they had failed if they referred cases to the Courts and until all Magistrates issue the same penalty, there appears to be little point in preparing lengthy court reports for cases which receive insubstantial penalties. The maximum fine is £2500 per parent but to date no parent residing in the authorities participating in this study has received the maximum fine.

As stated in chapter one, it is the premise of this thesis that, for the EWO to be effective, it is important to return the non-attender to full-time education within 12-24 weeks. Of the 64 individual cases of non-attendance monitored, less than 40% were closed at the end of the six-month period. Of this percentage, 18 had returned to school full-time and 7 had been referred to alternative education provision. The 39 cases that remained open can be categorised as follows: 6 parents were prosecuted and in one other case the decision was made not to prosecute the parents, as the mother was mentally ill. 5 ESOs were granted, 5 pupils transferred schools, one pupil moved area, one school attendance order was issued. In almost all cases the parent/s were contacted initially before any meetings with the child and the EWO. The reason for this is to gain parental permission to speak to their child in school as well as raising concerns about attendance. Each case remained open in order for the EWO to monitor the attendance. Additionally, in a further 19 cases, EWS intervention was at the stage of letter writing and home visit contact in an effort to improve attendance, therefore these cases remained open. A summary of case interventions appears as Table 7 (pages 172-3).

By far the most far-reaching practice was the whole school approach. The EWO who utilised this approach worked with a higher number of pupils and was able, therefore to improve the attendance of a larger band of non-attenders i.e. the 'nine-day fortnighters', the habitually late, the term-time holiday takers, those who attend three out of four weeks. Generally, the EWO targeted the 70-85% attenders and he was measurably more effective than those EWOs who worked with pupils with below 75% referred by the school and who were more difficult to engage with. This particular EWO had studied the attendance data of the school and looked for patterns that emerge, he designed a whole school programme to be implemented over a two-year period with the intention of improving attendance.

Table 7: Analysis of case interventions. Each of the 64 cases was referred due to attendance of less than 70%.
Please note: the most effective outcomes are classified as Y and Z. This indicates the pupil returned to full-time education within 12- 24 weeks.

	Interventions											
Case	**a**	**b**	**c**	**d**	**e**	**f**	**g**	**h**	**i**	**j**	**k**	**Outcome**
A1 year 10	1	1		3	1		1		1		1	W
A2 year 8	2	1										Q
A3 year 11	2	2	6	4		1			1		1	W
A4 year 9	1	2	3	2					1			V
B1 year 2	1			1								Z
B2 year 4	2	2										V
B3 year 5	1			10								V
B4 year 6	1	1	3	1					1			Z
C1 year 10		1	1		1		1		1	1		X
C2 year 9	1	1		2			1		1			P
C3 year 8	2	1	1				1					Z
C4 year 10	2											U
D1 year 9	Z			3				1	1	1		Z
D2 year 10	Z	1		1				1				Y
D3 year 8	1			1				1				Y
D4 year 7	1	1										Z
E1 year 7	1	1	1									Z
E2 year 9		1		1	1		1			1		Y
E3 year 6	1		2									Z
E4 year 2	1			2					1	1		Decision to defer X
F1 year 6	1			1								Z
F2 year 8	2	1	1	1					1			Z
F3 year 6	1	1		1	1							Z
F4 year 1	1	1										V
G1 year 7	2											Z
G2 year 10	1	1				1						V
G3 year 11	1	1					1					V
G4 year11	1	1					1					V
H1 year 9	5		3	16		1			1	1		W
H2 year 9	6		3	11		1			1		1	W
H3 year 10	1	2				2		1				Y
H4 year 10	1	2				1		1	1	1		X
J1 year 10		1	2			2		1				Y
J2 year 9			1	3			1					V
J3 year 8	1	1			1	1	1					V
J4 year 9	1	4		4				1				Y
K1 year 11	7	6	10	7					1			T
K2 year 9		1		3	1	2						V
K3 year 7			5			1						T

Case	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	Outcome
K4 year 9	6		6	14		3			1			V
L1 year 7				8		1						Z
L2 year 9	5	1	5	18		1			2	1		X
L3 year 9	7	3	4	3		2			1	1		X
L4 year 11	5		6	5					1	1		Z
M1 year 3	1		2	2	1	2						Z
M2 year 5	1		6	9		1						V
M3 year 6	1			3		2			1		1	W
M4 year 8	1	1	2	1								Z
N1 year 6	1		1		11	1						V
N2 year 9	1			1								Z
N3 year 7	1	1	3				1	1				Y
N4 year 8		3	4	6		1						V
O1 year 2				1					1			Z
O2 year 7	1		7	1								Mother propositioned EWO. Case passed to Senior
O3 year 9		1	1	3		1						V
O4 year 8		2	1	2		1						V
P1 year 9	1	1		2								S T
P2 year 10		1	1						1	1	1	X
P3 year 8	3	1	3									T
P4 year 10	1	2		1		1			1			V
Q1 year 7			8	1		1						Z
Q2 year 8	4			5		1	1					V
Q3 year 9	2	1		5			1		1	1		X
Q4 year 9	4	2			1	1			1			T

Case Intervention Codes

a-letter to parents; **b**-meeting in school with school staff and pupil/parents; **c**-telephone contact; **d**-home visit; **e**-contact GP; referral to social services, educational psychologist, medical; **f**-intensive support from EWO i.e. collecting pupil and escorting them to school, one-to-one sessions with pupil, group work; **g**- re-integration programme; **h**- referral to pupil referral unit, college, extended work experience placement; **i**-court assessment meeting; **j**- refer to court for prosecution; **k**-apply for an education supervision order and if granted case remains open for twelve months.

Case Outcome Codes

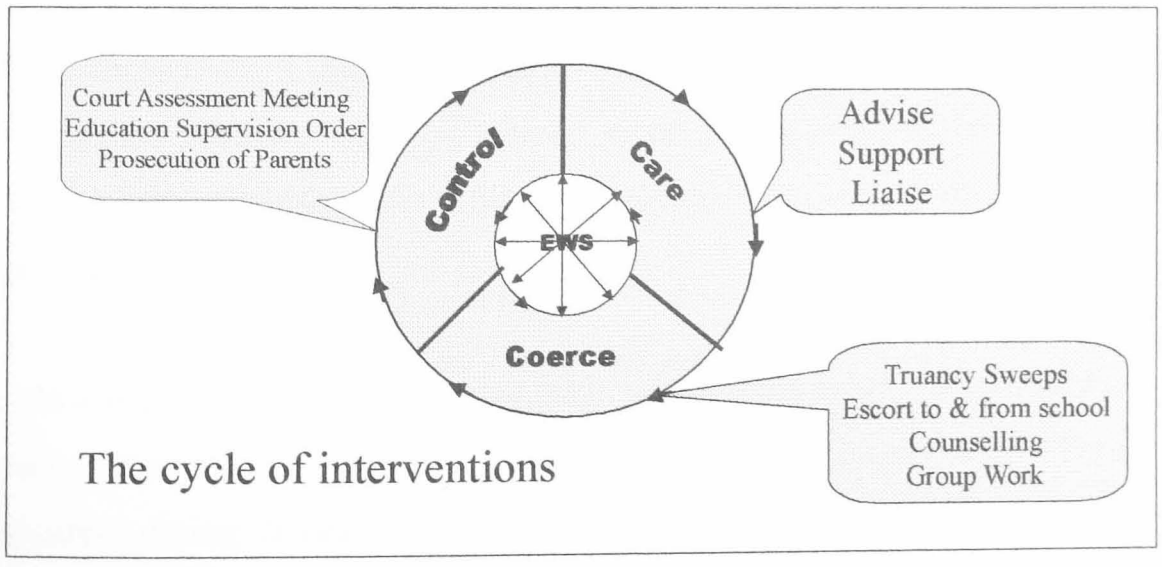
Z – case closed, pupil returns to full-time education; **Y** – case closed, pupil attends alternative education provision i.e. pupil referral unit, study centre, home and hospital tuition, parents decide to home educate, college placement or extended work experience; **X** – parents prosecuted; **W** – EWO granted an education supervision order to supervise pupil's education; **V** – continue to work with family; **U** – family moves from area; **T** – transfer of school, **S** – pupil is hospitalised; **R** – pupil is accommodated by local authority in a children's home or with a family; **Q** – School Attendance Order (SAO) naming school to be attended. This order is granted in cases where parents fail to enrol their child/ren at a school; **P** – decision not to take court action due to parents ill health (physically or mentally).

6.5 Putting it into Practice

Education Welfare Officers support schools in their efforts to achieve the highest possible level of pupil attendance by advising on attendance policies and practice, and by direct work with children and families. 75% of those interviewed believed that the school non-attender must be considered in the context of his or her family and their problems but felt they did not have the time or the resources to deal effectively with the multitude of social problems that some of the families have. Two EWOs complained that although they are encouraged to work in partnership with other agencies there have been a number of cases where they have been unaware of other agencies working with the same family. 25% of interviewees expressed their concerns that they often felt frustrated and dissatisfied with their role.

Figure 13 illustrates the cycle of interventionist approaches, which EWOs may adopt in their daily routine when working with a school non-attender.

Figure 13: Cycle of Interventions



6.6 Adoption of Common Standards of Working Practices

6.6.1 Current position

Nationally there are no standardised guidelines for good practice within the EWS. What appears to happen is that it depends on individual professionalism or judgement as to the standard of practice schools and families can expect to receive. LEAS that

were looked at in this study are divided 50:50 on whether or not they have a standardised procedure for non-attendance. Thus there were variations between authorities, and there were also variations within managerial departments. All, however, had a certain amount in common; these included such practices as officers visiting the homes of pupils referred to them, collaborating with schools and other relevant agencies and organising meetings and case conferences.

Experience in an officer makes a difference, as one interviewee revealed:

> When I started as an EWO I was less confident, less experienced and more judgmental. Knowledge and experience have helped me develop. The framework of legislation influences my working practice. I started out as a residential social worker; I felt I had to fight for the rights of client. I've learnt to accept the law and focus on attendance issues. (EWO.)

EWOs in authorities where a standardised procedure was followed said they liked this. The benefits were the effective channels of communication and guidelines throughout. This helped them, the pupils and the schools. EWOs working without standardised procedures felt that communication was more variable and more dependent on their own control of it. Freedom to act in their own way without strict guidelines was liked by those with the experience and confidence to work in this mode. Others disliked being thrown on to their own resources. However, all interviewees highlighted the importance of flexibility in procedures since, as one practitioner stressed 'it allows me to work autonomously and to decide the direction in which I am going to take the case i.e. to prosecute or not'.

Below is a list of questions put to some of the interviewees. It should be noted that in some cases the final questions were not put to a number of EWOs as it became apparent during discussion that the interviewee did not understand the question and rather than embarrass the interviewee the theoretical questions were not asked. All social work trained EWOs attempted to answer the questions put to them:

> How does legislative framework influence you?
> What values do you bring to your practice?
> How do your values influence your practice?
> Do any of the following factors hinder your values being implemented in your practice - agency policy, personal issues, gender, legislation, race, person issues, other?

Final questions put to interviewees at the third interview:

> Do you actively consider the model of education welfare intervention you are using with a client?
> If yes, how do you decide which method/theory of ESW to use?
> If you were asked to label (Methods/theories of social work practice) your practice, what label would you use e.g. behaviourist, task-centred, humanist/client centred, radical or other?

6.6.2 Standardised approach versus flexibility

The introduction of government targets, which have to be met by LEAs, has had an impact on the work of the EWS. In one authority service level developments had been identified as effective practice. The service-level agreement gave clear guidelines and expectations for schools on the role of the EWS and the role of the school in addressing attendance issues. The interviewee who worked with this system considered that having 'a clear, written procedure for involvement of the EWS in schools tightens up the process, cuts down the time spent at different stages and enables me too move the case on'. However, in discussion with other interviewees, the importance of flexibility in procedures was repeatedly emphasised as it allowed EWOs to operate autonomously.

One interviewee commented:

> Perhaps I should be more flexible. Could bend the rules but I don't. I know how far you can go with things - know limits. I am experienced, able to judge situations and consider values of the family when assessing.

However, a manager of an EWS expressed this view:

> EWOs need to be directed. The focus of the work should not be about satisfying an EWOs ambition, that is 'supporting families with difficulties' but focus on what gets kids back into school and re-engaged in education. Encourage them [the non-attender] to reach their full potential.

6.6.3 A working example of standards in interventions

This section describes a model of education welfare intervention in one of the EWS's taking part in this study. Although on occasions it appeared that some EWOs did not adhere to EWS guidelines, the majority of staff regarded the structure of methods of intervention as a highly successful tool. EWOs interviewed from this particular EWS

agreed that the guidelines made their job much easier in that caseloads were maximised to 25 and the use of 'target of intervention sheets' aided explanations to families about the length of time an EWO would support the family before the case would be referred to the Courts for prosecution. The EWS Guidelines (Hertfordshire, 1998) state:

> That once a referral is formally accepted as an open case the EWO should write to the parents within five days and arrange a face-to face meeting either at school, at the parents home or at the Area Office. The EWO should enclose a copy of the EWS School attendance leaflet with this initial letter. It can often be helpful to involve a member of the staff from the school in this first meeting. (If the EWO decides that the meeting should be at the parent's home he/she should be clear as to the reasons for this.) At this meeting the EWO will gather information, which will enable him/her to make an initial assessment sand decide on a form of intervention (which will always include the setting of targets for improvements). Such intervention might involve meetings with the child (and/or parents) in school, setting up a programme of home visits in order to work on such issues as parenting skills etc., taking the child into school as part of a structured programme, referring to other agencies or perhaps, considering a legal response.

Each case of good practice observed during this study had elements of a clearly structured programme of intervention. Whatever method of intervention is decided upon there are three crucial issues to consider. EWS guidelines state that the intervention must be time limited, include clear and agreed targets, provide a mechanism for active monitoring with set review dates (EWS Guidelines, 1998).

6.7 Policy versus Practice

The conclusion from these results is of a very varied EWS service. Policies and procedures are not standardised and there is not, as yet, a consensus from the government and the service about its aims and objectives of the service. It has been seen that EWOs are by and large very dedicated and committed but would welcome clearer guidelines and more training about effective methods.

The welfare role of the EWS has over the past five years been discouraged at all levels, from government guidelines through to line management. The emphasis is now on enforcing school attendance although it would be termed as 'encouraging regular school attendance'.

> LEAs can have a far greater effect on attendance and exclusion rates by promoting improvements in schools' management of absence and behaviour than by individual casework. (Audit Commission, 1999: 24.)

DfEE school attendance policy guides the LEA policy for EWS responsibilities which informs the EWS policy for schools which then informs the EWS policy for EWOs to deliver a service on behalf of the LEA to schools as well as to pupils and families. The spectrum of involvement and the relevant methods and skills of intervention range from one-to-one meetings to key-worker in child protection cases. The implementation of the methods and skills of intervention discussed earlier depend upon the policy of the DfEE, the LEA, EWS management and the expertise of individual officers and their interpretation of policy.

6.7.1 The government's education policy

The LEAs are charged in law with enforcing school attendance where pupils of compulsory school age are concerned (DfEE, 1994: 3). Under Regulation 13 of the Pupils Registration Regulations 1995 (DfEE, 1995b) guidelines state that all schools are required to report to their LEA on continuous pupil absence of not less than two weeks ands on those who fail to attend school regularly, except where such absences are covered by a medical certificate. The DfEE guidelines suggest those attendance rates under 90% should be investigated by the LEA (DfEE, 1999). The Audit Commission Report *Missing Out* (1999) found that LEAs had very mixed approaches and results in tackling truancy and recommended that more preventative work should be done at school level. Concerns were raised about the impact of legal powers and suggestions were made that parental attitudes regarding education need to be changed.

Currently, the government's agenda is to break the cycle of poor attendance, low educational achievement and the damaged prospects for adult life. Concern with the problem of social exclusion led to the establishment of the Social Exclusion Unit (1998) whose first task was to investigate exclusion from the educational process. The subsequent *Social Inclusion: Pupil Support* (1999) document sets out the government's intention to tackle truancy. The DfEE proposals can be summarised as follows:

> There will be strong support for the spread of good practice on reducing truancy, including celebrating the achievements of those

> schools that have reduced truancy with 'Truancy Buster' awards for best results. There will be increased funding to tackle truancy directly. The resources at secondary school level, which LEAs currently spend on their EWS, should be placed under the management of schools. All LEAs to retain responsibility for strategic action and multi-agency working to tackle truancy and continue to provide an EWS to primary schools. There will be an increase in the penalties for school attendance offences to level 4 of the national scale.

6.7.2 The policy of the LEA

Two LEAs saw that the role of the EWS was changing and acknowledged that EWOs would be devolved to schools. Feedback from NASWE and UNISON meetings indicated that the government's intentions were to place EWOs directly under school management. At the time of this study the issue of devolvement was a DfEE consultation document and each LEA was putting their comments forward to be considered. Pilot schemes of EWO devolvement were taking place throughout the UK.

LEAs have no legal obligation to provide an education welfare service or to employ EWOs. Consequently the service has no inherent statutory remit but most LEAs provide an EWS to help them carry out their statutory responsibilities that includes investigation of school absences. Each LEA taking part in this study each had a policy in place regarding the EWSs role in assisting them meet their responsibilities. One authority had service level agreements between the school and the LEA, clearly stating what the school should expect from its EWS.

The policy of each of the four LEAs varied in how they defined the EWSs role and the range of activities they were expected to pursue. They then had to allocate resources to the EWS, and as these are always under pressure they could not always give as much as was asked for. However, they did accept that the EWS's role is a primary support to the education service. However, in all authorities, the primary role was to investigate non-attendance.

6.7.3 The policy of EWS management

The senior managers of the EWS, with titles such as Principal EWO or Chief EWO, were satisfied with the interventions and work of the EWOs. They saw a need for more training and advice on best methods but many did not have the resources to do this.

Others had found resources to provide in-service training. One authority had a structured induction programme for newly appointed EWOs who were expected to attend regardless of qualifications. Others used their resources to support interested EWOs in already established independent part-time courses. Regular one-day professional development programmes were available in most authorities. Handouts were provided which relate to methods and skills intervention to the work of the EWS and specifically to non-attendance. Group work, crisis intervention, task-centred and contract strategies were singled out as being of particular value.

Most managers try to provide an on-going training programme. The take-up and response to these opportunities for professional development has been good, leading to more provision being made where possible. The EWOs in such authorities have an advantage over those working where there is no money for professional development.

In order for the EWS to retain credibility with schools, their parents and other services, the LEA must ensure a reasonable balance between the remit and expectations of the service and the resources required to carry this out effectively (Blyth & Milner, 1997: 40). Only one authority at the time of this study had a handbook available to its EWOs stating the EWS procedures and guidelines within which to work. However, each EWS published information for schools, ranging from leaflets to extensive handbooks, explaining the duties, which they performed on behalf of the LEA. Two of the authorities produced handbooks to schools outlining policy statements and areas covered were attendance, child protection, special educational needs, exclusions and admissions and entertainment and employment licences.

Without exception attendance was regarded as the priority issue by each EWO but not one of the 16 interviewees indicated that they were involved with any of the above areas other than attendance. Analysis of data showed no evidence of EWOs undertaking duties dealing with child protection, special educational needs, working

with excluded pupils or issuing entertainment licences or checking the appropriateness of work premises and working hours for the employment of school age young people other than passing the information on to the relevant department. In each of the authorities the issuing of entertainment licences and work permits was undertaken by an administration worker not by an EWO.

6.7.4 Prior experience and the job

It emerged earlier in this study that officers come from a wide variety of educational and professional backgrounds. Less than 50% of the interviewees had a social work qualification or a degree.

EWOs who were social work trained were found to understand the theory behind their interventions and they said this made them more confident and effective. Those officers who used interventions with little theory or experience behind them felt that they were being superficial and even doing more harm than good. The latter emerged from discussions of such practice as behaviour modification or task-centred intervention programme.

Three interviewees who had a particular expertise such as group work of both a therapeutic and recreational kind said they were more satisfied with what they had achieved. Once a project had been set up they found it both constructive and economical in time. Working with teachers, youth and social workers was positive, as was the opportunity for peer group support.

These were positive attitudes. The less positive comments pointed to several constraints. Workloads were frequently far too heavy so there was no time for developing solutions. Liaison with Head Teachers and staff was unsatisfactory because school staff knew too little about the service and imposed inflexible working rules of their own.

When an EWO wanted to use an innovative intervention, using their own initiative, the lack of managerial support was a constraint. Supervision and monitoring was wanted

with the considerable organisational and administrative tasks as well as support with negotiations with EWS colleagues and those of other agencies.

It was suggested by one interviewee that:

> There should be recognition that out of hours activities are a temporary situation. Working extra hours in addition to a normal day's work should not be a normal ongoing practice and in any case the extra hours should be formally compensated.

Interviewees had worked out what they thought should be done to address the above points. The focus was on developing fieldwork skills and managerial level capabilities. This would involve setting up of clear aims, objectives and a code of professional practice for the EWS. For example, separating the skilled professional work from clerical and administrative duties as well as setting up awareness and education for other agencies and consumers to make clear the role and practices of the EWS service.

The suggestion here is that the service is still widely regarded as a lower-status profession. Many interviewees felt the service was understaffed and under-resourced with concern expressed regarding the lack of a recognised qualification for EWOs. The issue about humanitarian versus the traditional approach to school attendance has long prevailed within the EWS and reflects diverse developments taking place in the EWS nationally. There are clear implications about a need to identify and implement unified standards of practice if the service is to develop a consistent professional identity. What needs to happen for the service to develop professionally is for managers to decide and implement strategies to address non-attendance and consider whether they will achieve an appropriate balance between preventative (focused on the symptom of non-attendance and remedial (focused on the causes of non-attendance) approaches.

6.8 Performance indicators

As stated in section 3.6.5, one of the aims of interviewing and observing EWO working practice was to establish performance indicators. One service participating in the study had introduced a database, which was used to monitor individual casework and to establish attendance targets. The manager reported that the overall purpose of the database for the EWS was to provide management information to ensure that the

service could measure its impact in an objective way and set performance measures and targets. The key element of the database was having a system that provided the correct information, in the correct place and correct time so that the authority could ensure resources were there and that there was a co-ordinated approach to delivery across services and agencies. The manager went on to say:

> Key to this process is the development of meaningful local performance indicators to enable us to compare our performance with others. Year on year these indicators will provide the basis for tracking progress, reporting to the public, and for setting targets for service improvements.

Specific objectives of a performance indicator database were by one manager highlighted as:

Percentage of cases referred to EWOs which:
reach 90% attendance level within 24 weeks
reach 80% attendance level within 24 weeks

Average improvement in attendance levels of cases referred to EWOs after 8 weeks - attendance % recorded when the case is opened and attendance % when the case is closed.

Measure of value for money:
ratio of EWOs to total pupil population
cost per pupil (EWS staffing budget/total number of pupils).

The use of performance indicators enables EWS management to collect relevant data to inform decisions regarding the plans for more effective use of staff. By implementing an effective review and monitoring system decisions can be made that lead to an improved consultation and evaluation process, resulting in improved attendance levels in schools.

6.9 'Best Practice' model

As discussed in section 2.5.1 the way in which an EWS formulates its aims and priorities, the organisation and deployment of its EWOs, and the procedures by which it operates, are all crucial to the effectiveness of its communication with schools and families. Although the Department of Education and Science (1989) discuss examples of 'best practice' within EWSs inspected and characteristics of the best examples of EWOs' work they do not suggest a how the individual EWO can be effective. This

section will report on how the EWO interview analysis and observations of practice from this current research generated a 'best practice' model.

There was a definite divide between the working practice styles of EWOs. Table 7 (pages 172-3) presents a summary of the interventions EWOs applied to each of the 64 cases. Of the 16 EWOs interviewed, 5 practiced along the lines of a social work approach working with families on a one-to-one basis with fewer cases making progress. One particular EWO collected a mother from home and took her shopping as she found it difficult to get on a bus. Table 7 depicts the characteristics of this approach by intensive contact with parents and pupils in addition to engaging the pupil in one-to-one or group sessions and/or collecting pupil to escort them to or from school. EWOs who provided cases H1-4, K1-4, L1-4, M1-4 and Q1-4 fall into this category. Of these 25 cases, 9 (36%) were closed following EWS intervention i.e. pupil returned to school full-time or as in one case, the pupil was referred to a pupil referral unit. 4 parents were prosecuted for their child's non-attendance and 3 ESOs were granted. In total 11 (44%) cases remained open, as there was no improvement in attendance.

Six EWOs appeared to assess each case independently and change their tack as the case progressed e.g. at first the EWO was very supportive with the family offering to take the child into school but changed style to that of law enforcer when progress was not being made. Four EWOs definitely adopted the style of traditional 'school board man' focusing on getting the child into school e.g. although the EWO considered the family circumstances it was decided the child needed to be educated in order to escape the 'cycle of deprivation' the family was locked into. The characteristics of this style of practice are initial contact with parents followed by a meeting in school, if there is no improvement in child's attendance the EWO arranges a court assessment meeting (sometimes referred to as a review meeting) in order to discuss legal implications with parents. EWOs who provided cases C1-4, E1-4, F1-4 and P1-4 fall into this category. Of these 20 cases, 9 (45%) were closed following EWS intervention i.e. pupil returned to school full-time or as in one case, the pupil was referred to a pupil referral unit. 3 parents were prosecuted for their child's non-attendance and a decision was made in one case not to prosecute the parent for medical reasons. In total 6 (30%) cases remained open, as there was no improvement in attendance.

In one authority two EWOs sitting next to each other in the same office were observed working with families completely differently. One EWO had been working with a family for six months. She visited the home offering support and advice and on occasion drove the family to social service appointments in an attempt to resolve the attendance issues. At the end of observation period this case remained open and no improvement in the child's attendance was recorded. On the other hand, the EWO sitting at the next desk had a similar non-attendance case referred to her but instead of visiting the parents and child in their own home she held the meetings in school. After four weeks, as there was no improvement in the child's attendance the EWO sent the parents the first letter warning them of court proceedings. Following a meeting held in the school, the child's attendance improved over the following four-week period and the case was then closed.

One conclusion drawn from this stage of the research was that EWOs, although given basic guidance as to how to deliver the service, do operate autonomously. The variation in practice was found to be wide but as no two cases are exactly the same i.e. taking into account personal characteristics of school non-attenders as well as family socio-economic factors, it is difficult to measure like with like. However, with this in mind, data indicated that those EWOs who adopted a traditional 'law enforcer' approach to non-attendance resolved 45% of their cases compared to the EWOs who worked from a social work perspective resolving 36% of their cases. The difference in working practice was found to be the amount of EWO contact with the family.

It appears the more contact officers had with a family, the less likely the case is resolved i.e. child returns to school full-time. The reason for this could be the more aware the EWO is of the family circumstances it can become, for some officers, more difficult to enforce the law if, for example, the family are experiencing difficulties. Alternatively, it could be argued that the pressure exerted onto parents from the EWO by continued monitoring and observation of the non-attender could create or exasperate existing problems.

The best examples of EWOs' work were characterised by focused consultation meetings with school staff; clearly defined criteria for referring non-attenders to EWS;

good working records were maintained providing clear details on referrals and general preventive non-attendance work within the school. One of the surprising findings that emerged was the range of working practice style, from the supportive social work to the law enforcement approach. It became apparent at this stage that the working practice style of the EWOs could be grouped according to choice of interventions. The EWO interventions applied to each of the 64 cases were recorded and monitored until the close of the case and from data gathered during this phase of the study it was possible to create three typologies of practice. The main assemblages can be listed as below:

Model A Supportive Social Work Approach – Caseload 10

Pre-referral work by school.
Consultation between EWO and school staff.
Referral accepted by EWO.
Case opened - strategies used include: one to one support for pupil/family, home visits, telephone calls, and escorting/transporting parents/pupil to appointments.
Outcome: Child returns to school/unit
Court Assessment Meeting.
Application to the Court for an education supervision order.
Refer case to Court for Prosecution.

Model B Traditional Enforcement Officer Approach – Caseload 25

Pre-referral work by school.
Consultation between EWO and school staff.
Referral taken accepted by EWO.
School Meeting with parent/pupil.
Home Visit.
Outcome: Child returns to school/unit/college/extended work experience.
Court Assessment Meeting.
Refer case to Court for prosecution.

Model C Whole School Approach – caseload 40

EWO looks at attendance data, looking for emerging patterns e.g. particular days of the week, large numbers of pupils who make extended visits to their parents' country of origin.
Expectation of pre-referral work undertaken by school staff.
Target specific groups e.g. vulnerable Year 7 secondary transition pupils, Year 10 troublemakers, and Year 9 disaffected pupils.
Present assemblies, PSE lessons.
Invite all parents of those pupils with less than 80% attendance into the school for a meeting individually.
Court Assessment Meeting.

Refer to the Court cases of chronic non-attendance.
Review personal experience in implementation.

There are few nationally agreed norms for EWOs. The precise roles practised by EWOs tend to differ by LEA and by the school for whom they are responsible. One of the aims of this research has been to clarify the remit of the EWS and of EWOs and to consider if the service is effectively organised to deliver its remit. What is required then is more strategic planning and written guidance to ensure implementation of unified standards of practice which in turn will support the service to develop a consistent professional identity. Monitoring EWO effectiveness is vital. An EWS needs to know which actions work best and in which circumstances.

6.10 Summary

The findings presented here focus on the problem areas identified in previous chapters. Firstly, the suggestion that the majority of an EWOs work is around school and home visits with over 60% of their time being taken up with administrative duties. Certainly findings here would support these suggestions which corroborates the implication that there is not sufficient time to work one-to-one with non-attenders or to do the more specialised roles e.g. group work, counselling.

Secondly, evidence gathered at this stage of the study strengthens the suggestion that the EWO actually works with the adult in the situation not the non-attender. Three out of the four interventions observed in this study have initial contact with the parent/guardian of the non-attender rather than as would be generally believed, the young person themselves. However, that is not to say in some cases attempts are not made to engage with the young person.

Thirdly, EWOs are unclear about their role and would welcome clearer guidelines and training about effective methods of intervention. It was evident from interviews with EWOs that currently, the training they receive does not reflect the duties they perform. Analysis of data showed no evidence of EWOs undertaking regularly, duties dealing with child protection, special educational needs, working with excluded pupils or

issuing entertainment licences. Interviewees' comments have been analysed and have contributed to the following recommendations:

1. Setting up of clear aims, objectives and a code of professional practice for the EWS.

2. Separating the skilled professional work from clerical and administrative duties.

3. Setting up awareness and education for other agencies and consumers to make clear the role and practices of the EWS service.

Lastly, a key issue that has emerged in this chapter is that in our attempt to identify the strengths of the service we have indeed identified a major weakness, and that is the fact that EWOs still operate autonomously and by and large use their own rule of thumb about what action is appropriate for each type of case. This has culminated in a variation in practice not only between individual officers but also different local authorities suggesting a postcode lottery to users of the service. Surely, all young people should expect to receive nothing less than a professional service to meet their individual needs.

The effectiveness of EWS intervention was articulated by interviewees in a variety of ways: impact on individual pupils, parents, schools and impact on statistics of national significance in relation to current government targets such as attendance figures. Overall, interviewees were agreed that the EWS was committed to improving attendance, although the tasks required to fulfil that duty were many and varied. The research reported in this chapter demonstrated the importance of establishing and developing good practice guidelines. Examples of successful practice highlighted during interviews with EWOs, were used as a guide by the researcher in an attempt to establish exactly what is effective working practice for the EWO.

Effectiveness was more often expressed, however, through subjective comments rather than through formal evaluation criteria and it was often difficult, when interventions were either indirect or long-term to gauge effectiveness in terms of their impact on attendance figures. Therefore in order to establish a 'best practice' model that would be used in the next stage of the research the researcher assessed the working styles of the sixteen EWOs and recorded the number of cases that were effectively brought to a

closure i.e. the attendance rate increased to 80%. From interview and observation data analysis it was possible to identify three different styles of practice used by EWOs to improve school attendance.

Model A has characteristics of a caring approach with the EWO providing advice and support to the family to encourage the pupil back to school. Model B could be described as a control model practiced by the EWO who intends to enforce the law regarding school attendance and prosecute parents for their child's non-attendance. EWOs who favour Model C concentrate on advising the school on strategies to address attendance issues as well as undertaking pro-active work with school staff and pupils. With this in mind the model that was adopted for the researcher to implement for action research was Model C. This particular model of practice was chosen, as it would enable data to be gathered on interventions aimed at improving the whole school population's attendance as well as evaluating the effectiveness of contact with parents. The following chapter will report the findings of this phase of the study.

Chapter Seven: Putting it into practice

7.1 Introduction

The final phase of the study was putting observations into practice, what was deemed to be effective practice was then put to the test at a school in special measures. I was the cover EWO for two years at a school in a garden suburb and was in a position to trial various practices in an attempt to tackle the chronic attendance problem at the school. To maintain confidentiality the school will be referred to as School A.

In an attempt to tackle the research question how to effectively re-engage the school non-attender an action plan was created, as set out in section 3.7.1 outlining the two-year time-scale for the final phase of project and what activities would take place in this period. The initial idea, illustrated as the first stage of the action research model (figure 5: 94), involved analysing the problem i.e. improving attendance figures and developing a hypotheses i.e. EWS intervention that improves attendance figures. Many of the interventions suggested and practised by EWOs were considered constructive in addressing the issue of non-attendance, but in the light of the government targets to improve attendance the most efficient initiative, as practised by the researcher of this study, is the whole-school response to non-attendance.

Having examined and practised the general approaches and interventions that interviewees identified, the initiatives in this chapter are presented as examples of effective working practice. The findings of this section of the study tested Working Practice typology C – Suggested/Preferred Government model – and consider it to be effective at tackling attendance problems on a larger scale. Models A and B were not tested here but an evaluation of these approaches during the interview and observation phase of this study indicated that although they were effective the number of cases covered were fewer. The following is an evaluation of method used during this phase of the study to tackle the research question. It also presents evidence of outcome of effectiveness.

7.2 Action Research

School A had failed an Ofsted inspection in April 1998 and was in special measures largely due to poor attendance and poor academic achievement (24% achieved A-C grade GCSEs in 1998). It was in receipt of GEST-funded initiatives, which had facilitated strategies to address the needs of school non-attenders such as a school-based school attendance project worker. The school was situated in a leafy garden suburb and in 1998 there were 600 pupils on roll. According to school records over 95% of the school population were from a white, working-class background; 20% were entitled to free school meals and over 30% of the Year 7 intake had special educational needs. The overall school attendance rate was reported as 83%. The government expect schools achieving under 90% to be investigated – DfEE guidelines indicate a successful school maintains an attendance average of around 94-5%. Attendance data was extracted from a computerised registration system (SIMS) and access gained to pupil files and case notes was authorised by senior management.

The general plan of action, second stage of action research model (figure 5: 94) was developed from preliminary discussions and negotiations with EWS manager and school staff. The objectives, purpose and assumptions of my research were made clear to interested parties. When I joined the school in September 1998 the overall attendance figure was 83% (figure submitted to DfEE) and in May 2000 the attendance figure was 89.9%. The school had failed its Ofsted inspection in May 1998 and in May 2000 it came out of special measures but with serious weaknesses. In order to address all issues of non-attendance, including lateness and targeting specific groups, I decided to use Working Practice typology C - Suggested/Preferred Government model as a framework for practice implementation. Utilising this model would allow me to provide interventions to a larger number of pupils rather than working more intensely with a smaller caseload.

7.2.1 Overview of Strategies Employed

I was allocated three days each week to cover the school; such was the school's needs. This was in fact substantial EWS time allocated to the school and at the time I was the only officer in the authority covering one school. During the implementation phase (figure 5: 93) of the research, methods and conditions of data collection were established. This involved the monitoring of tasks and transmission of continuous

feedback to interested parties. The following programme was implemented throughout the first six months:

Attendance data analysis

Meeting with form tutors to talk about EWS

Weekly consultation meetings with HoYs

Half-term meetings with Senior Management

Year Group Assemblies

PSE lesson talking about bullying to individual tutor groups in Year 8

Identifying specific groups to plan and conduct an attendance check targeting individual year groups

Sending parents letters informing them of their child's attendance rate – letter sent to under 80% attendance

Inviting parents of pupils with under 70% attendance into school for a meeting with EWO

Three parents were prosecuted.

A report was submitted at the end of six months to the LEA link education adviser to Ofsted. This allowed me to evaluate the impact of my actions to date and to modify or redefine, if need be, the 'initial idea' statement. As the aim of action research is at improvement and involvement, my practice of action and evaluation became interlinked. Information collected from this phase of the research was shared, discussed, recorded (diary log sheets as well as case notes) evaluated and ultimately, formed the basis of reviews. I raised concerns about the behaviour of pupils in lessons and the persistent problem of bullying in the school. These concerns were continually raised to me on routine home visits for non-attendance. Although these concerns were passed on to senior management at the school, nothing was done to resolve the problems therefore in an attempt to make staff more accountable, following my supervisor's advice I liaised with the link adviser. This contact continued during my period of cover and proved useful when irate parents complained that the head teacher never returned calls. All complaints were then passed to the link adviser to enable the LEA to have full picture.

7.2.2 Attendance Analysis

The project trial began in September 1998. The first task was to determine attendance patterns and to highlight target groups. One of my regular tasks was the collection and analysis of attendance/punctuality data. I achieved this by compiling weekly, termly and annual attendance figures of registration groups, year groups and whole school via the use of a computerised registration system. This allowed for graphical representations of the data to be produced on spreadsheets thus allowing me to keep track of attendance patterns throughout the academic year. This proved to be a valuable source to examine systems and procedures within the school that enabled me to highlight weaknesses and focus on target groups. By conducting regular attendance audits I was able to determine what was working and what was not.

Each week I held two-hour consultation meetings with school staff to discuss poor attenders. This was a regular slot and the expectation was that each HoY had been allocated this time 'off timetable' to discuss attendance with me. Each meeting and the agreed actions were recorded and staff given a copy. This time also gave us the opportunity to hold interviews of between 15-30 minutes with a non-attender and/or parents to agree a course of action. Additionally, it was important to regularly meet the Heads of Year (HOY) to make clear the EWS expectations with regard to pre-referral work to be undertaken before I would accept a referral. This was usual practice within the authority. However, staff at the school felt so overwhelmed by their teaching commitments they made it quite clear that they would not be able to do any pre-referral work e.g. telephone call to parents raising school's concern regarding their child's attendance.

So, within the first month target groups were highlighted and the fact that three HoYs (fortunately, two were very co-operative) were not able to address concerns was noted. It was decided between my supervisor and myself that the target groups would be Years 8, 9 and 10 with PSE sessions given to Year 7. Following a morning observation of school arrivals it became clear that some pupils were not registering as they arrived late. Areas of concern at this stage were chronic non-attendance amongst Year 10, lateness, bullying, lack of support from 3 HOYs, no allocated SEN co-ordinator and no permanent secretarial staff only one temporary secretary.

7.2.3 Initial contact with parents

At the end of each term I sent letters to the parents of all those pupils who failed to achieve 90% attendance, which were recorded, monitored and if need be, followed up with an interview at home or the school. This was an administrative task that could be undertaken by an administrative assistant. However, I considered it to be an effective piece of work as it outlined the school's expectations of regular attendance and the possibility of an outside agency's intervention.

One of the biggest problems I encountered during this period was that parents of pupils at the school would not respond to letters. Often when I conducted a home visit the parents were 'not in' or when invited into the school for a meeting they would not attend. On one occasion, over a two-day period, 45 parents were invited to an individual meeting with me to discuss their child's attendance – 12 parents attended, ten parents cancelled for one reason or another. It was the view of school staff that a culture had developed within the community that it was unimportant to respond to letters from the school or LEA. This was an area that had to be challenged and addressed in order to tackle the improvement of attendance. One teacher pointed out '*if parents are not seen by their children to value authority and attend meetings why should their children value school?*' but it was a consideration of this study that this apparent lack of parental support could be attributed to the fact that schooldays for some parents were determined by failure and/or humiliation that they avoid going to a child's school. Teachers who have gone from studying at school to college to teaching at a school may forget that for some parents entering a school can be a painful experience.

The 33 parents that missed their appointments each received a letter outlining the fact that their child's attendance would be monitored for a further four weeks and if no improvement a home visit would arranged. Following these letters I received fifteen phone calls from parents wishing to discuss the reasons for their child's absence. Following on from these cases, three cases were referred to the Magistrates Court for prosecution.

This particular intervention proved to be an administrative task as 45 were sent out to parents. However, although only 12 parents actually attended the interview arranged, this was considered an effective intervention as most of the parents who did not attend their appointment did telephone and speak to the EWO. This intervention reinforces the message of regular attendance expectations. Overall, the attendance of targeted year groups 9 and 10 attendance rates improved for some pupils up to 95 per cent.

7.2.4 Attendance Sweep

An attendance sweep was conducted on three occasions during the first six months of covering the school. Parents and pupils were informed of the intentions via the school's newsletter but dates were not specified. School staff welcomed this particular approach as it was thought to offer a contrast to the more supportive approach of working with individual pupils. As one teacher commented '...this is what is needed, an instant response to non-attendance rather than letting bad habits develop'.

A complete audit was undertaken of all registers. I conducted the inspection along with another EWO. Specific year groups were highlighted, and myself or the EWO who was assisting me visited all pupils who were absent on the designated day and whose parents had not contacted the school. On the three days the inspections were conducted the maximum number of parents visited was twelve, which amounted to a morning's work for two EWOs. In total 34 parents of Year 10 and 11 pupils were visited on three separate days.

Parents were asked why their child was not in school, and why they had not contacted the school to inform them of the absence. A letter was left with the pupil, parent or posted if no reply, giving contact details and explaining the implications of continued poor attendance. If the pupil opened the door and the parent was not home we did not enter the home but left the letter for the parent. An attendance sweep was thought by school staff to be effective because it had a high profile with parents; the school had to focus on attendance; the immediacy of the response and the fact that it highlighted groups of pupils who truanted.

7.2.5 First day contact

First day contact is when parents are contacted on the first day of their child's absence. The DfEE (1999) highlights this as an effective response to non-attendance and guidelines state 'if a pupil is absent without explanation when the register is called, school staff should wherever possible contact the parents the same day' (DfEE, 1999a: 19). This was the first initiative to be introduced alongside my regular meetings with HOYs and I was involved with the training of the school secretary who would administer this task. One of the first issues raised was how important it was not to be too sympathetic when a pupil or parent answers the phone and says, for example, '*Jane will not be in school because she has a cold/tummy bug/headache*'. I emphasised to the secretary that whilst we must be empathetic (assuming it is a genuine absence) we should be making clear the expectation to return to school. So, instead of '*ahh, I am sorry that you are not at school, hopefully you will be back in school next week*', I suggested the response should be *'I am sorry that you are feeling unwell today but I am sure you will feel well enough to return to school tomorrow, if not perhaps you should visit your doctor'*. This response was aimed at Year 10/11 pupils.

Although this particular initiative was aimed at all non-attenders we did operate some degree of selectivity. For instance the cases of below 50% were not contacted as I, as the EWO, had regular contact with the family. I recommended a two-hour slot each day so that the secretary would not spend most of her day trying to contact pupils/parents who were unobtainable (in some cases selectively not answering their telephone). I used attendance figures to evaluate success, comparing before and after levels. Data from register checks during a six-month period showed that attendance was improved by 5% since the introduction of first-day contact.

In the third month of this period I decided to contact parents if their child was not achieving 90% attendance and if the school had not received a suitable explanation. Letters to parents were consistently sent informing them of the percentage of their child's school attendance and of their legal responsibility with regard to 'ensuring their child received a suitable education according to their age, ability and aptitude' had a huge impact. This intervention was introduced following a register check that highlighted many pupils as having an odd day off 'here and there'.

This intervention had a huge impact as it generated responses from parents, often angry, that they had been contacted when as one parent said 'I telephoned the school and told them she [their daughter] would not be in school that day as we overslept. In order not to block the school's telephone lines I had to write the letters on LEA headed paper so that parents responding would contact the area office rather than the school. Both pieces of work are not skilled tasks and can be conducted by an administrator. However, they are time consuming and took up 80% of my time during the first few months but resulted in improved attendance and parental awareness that their child's presence was missed from school. It provided the opportunity to remind parents of their legal obligation with regard to their child's education.

7.2.6 Meetings with parents

At the end of the first academic year, the report submitted to the link adviser commented on the poor behaviour of students in classes and that the issue of bullying for many pupils was not resolved. In 40% of the cases referred to me, bullying was cited as the reason for non-attendance and it was a common complaint that when parents contacted the school their calls were never returned. Many parents had complained to me that when they had telephoned the school to speak to the Head teacher or the head of their child's year the calls were not returned and the issue for the parent and child remained unresolved.

On receiving referrals of non-attendance from school staff I would invite the non-attender and parent/s to a meeting in school with the head of year present. The focus of this meeting was to investigate the reasons for non-attendance and to agree a reintegration plan or 'contract' with all parties. I was supporting and encouraging pupils back into school but to a situation that had not been resolved, therefore it was not long before they were not attending again. During follow up home visits when asked the reason for not keeping to the 'agreed contract' parents and pupils informed me that the school '*had not done what they had agreed to do at the meeting*' i.e. to put into action an agreed re-integration programme. A critical issue raised during this phase of the study is that school staff and the EWO must work in partnership and attempt to resolve the problem that prompted the non-attendance in the first place, ensuring that

the child feels safe in school and is not waiting to abscond at the next available moment.

7.2.7 Group-work

During the first year I had contacted over two hundred parents, that is 30% of the school population, with regard to their child's attendance. At the end of the first year there was a core group of 8 non-attenders who had not responded to initial interventions. 4 of these were Year 8s and were offered a place on the non-attenders programme with a view to supporting them in Year 9. At no point did they all attend together, each week the group had 50% attendance. This was a group based on the principle of 'circle time' meeting for one hour, each week for six sessions during which time a diary was kept. This intervention noted that attendance for three group members 'improved dramatically' and individual improvements, e.g. from 30 to 100 per cent attendance, were noted. Effectiveness of this intervention is dependent on the structured programme of each session and the weekly monitoring of progress/non-progress of participants.

In addition to group-work I targeted individual absentees and groups by providing a 30-minute classroom based personal and social education session to year groups 8 and 9. Year 9 pupils were targeted as school staff saw this as the age when disaffection sets in. This intervention focused on key skills, building self-esteem and addressing issues such as bullying and school age employment. It was reported that this particular intervention was effective in educating whole year groups on the importance of regular attendance and introducing pupils to the fact that there is an outside agency [the EWS] who can advise them on school related issues.

Midway through the academic year a very enthusiastic SEN co-ordinator was appointed and made headway with the SEN support requirements of many pupils – some of whom were by now not attending because they were unable to cope with schoolwork.

7.2.8 Prosecutions

At the start of the second year of cover, I regularly visited and offered support to the 8 long-term non-attenders. This involved a lot of my time. As there was little improvement and following advice from my supervisor, three of the cases were

referred to the Magistrates Court for prosecution, three cases were referred to the Family Court for Education Supervision Orders, one pupil transferred to another school and one pupil moved to another area. Six court cases require a substantial amount of an EWO's time to be put aside for report writing. Again this is not a skilled task but an administrative task. Below is an evaluation of my actions, strategies and interventions for each of the eight cases taken from my caseload during the action research phase of this study.

The task-centred problem-solving approach, as described in chapter 3 section 3.6.5, was used as a guide in attempts to resolve all cases. There are three phases to this model of practice, the initial phase is an assessment and exploration of the problem with a view to setting goals; the middle phase involves task planning and implementation sequence; the termination phase that is a final review of the problem. In some cases this process becomes almost cyclic in nature. As the problem is not resolved i.e. the child does not return to full-time education it is not possible to withdraw EWS intervention from a pupil and their family, therefore it becomes a process of reviewing and adjusting the goals.

As you can see in cases 1-6, it was not possible to fully reach the termination phase although the process of terminating was always instigated in the initial phase of intervention. The eight cases described below are used to illustrate how, despite substantial EWS intervention, the EWO can be perceived as ineffective. This can be for a number of reasons. Firstly, the pupil has remained out of education for longer than 24 weeks. Secondly, the EWO may have failed to engage with the pupil/family. Thirdly, the problem presented is multi-faceted requiring a multi-disciplinary approach. As the EWO is not trained to undertake a diagnostic assessment, a referral is made to Social Service for further investigation. However, this can, in some cases, prolong the child's return to education. Please note all names are changed to protect identities.

Case 1: School Refuser Year 8

David M's parents had separated the previous year and he lived with his mother. His sister lived with their father and attended the same school as David. He was referred to the EWS as he was missing odd days from school. Overall, at the time of referral

he had attended 25 out of a possible 40 school sessions. David had a statement of needs that stated he should receive five hours of support each week.

Initial Phase: During an initial assessment home visit it was explained to me that David (reluctantly) attended primary school regularly with support and encouragement from his teacher. Mrs M thought that the reason for the absences was that David was not receiving his extra support and this she felt was contributing to his dislike of school. It was agreed at this visit that I would speak to the SEN co-ordinator to check what support David was receiving. I would monitor his attendance for the next two weeks and if need be contact Mrs M.

Middle Phase: I spoke to the SEN co-ordinator who told me that David did not receive 5 hours support in school, only two half hour sessions and he was not benefiting from any support, as he was not in school. I asked why David was not receiving his full quota of support and I was told the school did not have enough staff. As there was no improvement in David's attendance I arranged a meeting in school inviting the HOY 8, the SENCO, Mrs M and myself. It was agreed at this meeting that until the school could provide the full support David would be referred to the outreach support worker and also to the attendance group.

Mrs M described how each morning she has to argue with David to get him out of bed and off to school but that he often truants. Neighbours have reported seeing him over the park during school hours. The school agreed to contact Mrs M if David did not arrive at school.

David's attendance did not improve. I called round one morning to take David to school but he refused to get out of bed. Neither Mrs M nor myself could persuade him to get up. Another morning I called at the house and David climbed out of the bedroom window and ran off to the park. Mrs M said he often did this. She was at her wits end and could not cope. I referred Mrs M and David to a charity organisation in order to undertake family therapy sessions. This was a success with regard to David and Mrs M's relationship but did not improve attendance. Furthermore, the attendance group sessions in school were not successful David attended only two.

Termination Phase: At this stage it was decided that a Court Assessment Meeting should be arranged and Mr M should be invited. Up until this point Mrs M had refused to give me details as to where I could contact him as she felt 'he wouldn't do any good, only slag me off'.

Mr M did attend and was very angry as he felt that as David lived with his mother he [Mr M] should not be held responsible for David's attendance. I explained that both parents have responsibility with regard to their child's education. The decision from this meeting was that if there was no improvement within the next four weeks in David's school attendance an application would be made to the Family Court for an Education Supervision Order (ESO). The reason for this decision was that it was felt an ESO would provide a framework of support for David and Mrs M in order to ensure regular attendance.

I visited Mrs M and David at home to explain the implications of the ESO. It is expected that both parent/s and child attend Court. If, during the period of time of the order (usually twelve months) David's attendance does not improve we can go back to Court for new directions, for example the Magistrate may direct social services to conduct an investigation or perhaps to prosecute the parents for not ensuring regular attendance.

As there was no improvement in David's attendance despite full SEN support now being available an application to the Family Court was made for an ESO. Of course, had David received his full support during Years 7 and 8, I am sure there would not have been a need for an ESO. This was a case where the school had failed the pupil.

Outcome: 12 month Education Supervision Order issued. EWO continues to support pupil.

Case 2: School Refuser Year 8

The Education Welfare Service has known Thomas and his family since 1997. Thomas lived with Dad and his partner in a one bedroom flat for 7 months. He attended school regularly. He returned to live with Mum and his attendance began to deteriorate. Thomas is an able student and has no special educational needs. He is

very sociable but due to his prolonged non-attendance may find it difficult to reintegrate into school life.

Initial Phase: I visited Ms B in May; Thomas had attended 15 sessions out of a possible 50. Ms B informed me that Thomas was being bullied and that a teacher had sworn at him. The school investigated this; the bullying was resolved and the school had not further employed the supply teacher. A meeting was arranged in school but Ms B did not attend.

Thomas's attendance did not improve. I continued to call at the house but there was no response. I was very concerned that Thomas had not been in school for five weeks so I telephoned Ms B on her mobile and asked if I could visit her immediately, as I would like to see Thomas. She said that Thomas was with his grandmother who lived locally. I visited but could get no reply so I phoned Ms B and informed her that if I did not see Thomas that day I would have no alternative but to refer her to social services. I called at the house an hour later and spoke to Thomas. He returned to school the next day. I contacted Social Services and they were aware of the family but were not providing any support at that time.

Middle Phase: In order to improve his attendance, Thomas was included in Year 8 non-attenders group programme to run for six weeks. He attended two group sessions but did not attend any classes. Although Thomas made an effort to come along to the group sessions he refused to attend school. Therefore, in this particular case, group work provided no benefits for Thomas. A letter was sent to Ms B informing her of the implications of Thomas's continued non-attendance.

I contacted social services again and due to two referrals for neglect from concerned relatives a social worker visited the home but received no reply. I visited the home with a Social Worker, but again got no response. The social worker referred the matter to her manager, and no further action was to be taken from the social service department. I continued to telephone Ms B and leave messages on her mobile answer phone but getting no response from her.

I contacted Thomas's father who requested a meeting. I visited his home and he gave me some background to Thomas's home circumstances and that he often stayed at the home of another non-attender that I am working with. Apparently, Ms B attempted suicide last year and was taken into hospital (she has two younger children who attend primary school - no EWS involvement). Mr T's concern at this time was that he might be prosecuted for Thomas's non-attendance even though he feels there is nothing he can do about it as Thomas lives with his mother.

Mr T sometimes sees Thomas at weekends and often buys him clothes etc. he also impresses upon Thomas the importance of attending school regularly. Mr T asked to be kept informed of Thomas's attendance patterns.

It was arranged for Thomas to attend a non-attenders group run by the outreach worker who visited the school. Ms B was invited in to speak about the group's programme. Ms B did attend but Thomas attended only 3 school sessions and was absent again.

It was agreed at the meeting that if Thomas were absent on the day of the non-attenders group's meeting either the school support worker or I would go to the home to collect him. We did this on three occasions and could get no reply. Thomas attended two group sessions.

Termination Phase: During October Thomas was picked up by local police officers for causing criminal damage to a coach and parked cars. A letter was sent to Ms B and Mr T inviting them to attend a Court Assessment Meeting. Mr T sent his apologies that he could not attend but Ms B did not respond at all. A second appointment was sent but Ms B did not attend the meeting. Thomas's attendance remained very poor. The decision was made to refer the case to the Court for prosecution.

A Court Hearing was held but Ms B did not attend. Ms B was found guilty in her absence and fined £100. Thomas did not return to school.

Review of task planning: I visited the home the following week; Thomas had just left the house following an argument with his younger brother. I explained to Ms B that Thomas's place was still available on the non-attenders group with the school support worker but he had not been in school to benefit from it.
Ms B said she felt unable to cope with Thomas and could not get him to go to school as he refused. I advised her to contact social services and also to take Thomas to the GP who could refer the family to the Child and Family Clinic.

A meeting was held in school with Ms B, Thomas and the Head of Year 8. Thomas agreed to return to school. He attended for half a day but did not return for the afternoon session. A letter was sent to social services expressing my concerns for Thomas's safety. I visited the home again to explain to Ms B that as there is no improvement in Thomas's attendance a court assessment meeting would be arranged.

Termination Process: A Court Assessment Meeting was held on 8th February but Ms B did not attend. I received a copy of a letter sent to Ms B from social services. Apparently Ms B did not keep her appointment with the duty social worker; therefore the case would be closed.

Mr T contacted the EWS to inform me that Thomas had been admitted to the hospital the previous Saturday, as he was found unconscious and drunk in the local park.

I spoke to the duty officer at social services who were not aware that Thomas had been admitted to hospital but that Ms B had an appointment with a social worker that day and she would be asked about this incident. I telephoned the social worker at the hospital to enquire about the outcome of Thomas's admittance.

I received a call from a local police officer informing me that Thomas had been involved, whilst truanting from school, in smashing windows and causing damage at an old factory site. Thomas was returned home but Ms B was not there. A note was put through her door. The police officer took Thomas to school and spoke to his head of year.

I spoke to the social worker attached to the children's ward at the hospital, who assured me that she would send details of Thomas's admittance to social services. I telephoned social services and spoke to the duty officer about my concerns for Thomas's safety. We agreed to do a joint visit.

Thomas had not returned to school. I spoke to Mr T and informed him of the EWSs intention to apply for an ESO. He told me that he had not seen Thomas for two weeks but he had tried to contact him and spoken to Ms B. A decision was made during my supervision session that I would not refer the case back to Court for prosecution but would apply for an ESO. This was for two reasons; firstly in order to supervise Thomas's education and secondly, as I felt Thomas was at risk from drinking and committing criminal offences, an ESO would enable me to ask the Court to intervene.

I visited Thomas's home with a social worker from social services to explain to Mrs B. and Thomas the implications of an ESO. Ms B, Mr T and Thomas would be expected to attend the hearing. I explained the decision to apply for an ESO was reached as it was felt by myself and school staff involved with Thomas that his educational, emotional and social development was hindered by his poor school attendance, therefore he was not able to benefit from the educational support offered to him.

Following this meeting the social worker decided there was nothing he could offer Mrs B in the way of support and closed the case. I did not agree with this decision and it was my intention once I had acquired an ESO to request the Court, under section 37 of the Children Act 1989, to direct social services to make a full assessment of Thomas's needs.
An application for an ESO was made to the Family Court.

Outcome: 12 month Education Supervision Order issued. EWO continues to support pupil.

Case 3: School Refuser Year 8

Initial Phase: Joanne was referred to the EWS due to her poor attendance. She is an able student but due to her non-attendance has now fallen behind with her work.

Overall, Joanne had attended 22 out of 40 sessions. A meeting was arranged with her mother, Mrs C, who explained that Joanne was often upset by name calling from classmates. The HoY 8 dealt with the matter and Joanne was offered a place on the non-attenders group at the school. She attended each session and her attendance improved for the rest of the summer term.

Joanne was offered a place on the non-attenders programme meeting with an outreach support teacher on a weekly basis. She attended each session, but her school attendance was becoming increasingly erratic. A letter was sent to Mr and Mrs C, explaining the implications of Joanne's non-attendance. Joanne's attendance improved for four weeks but then started to deteriorate. It had been agreed that if Joanne did not attend the outreach session, the support worker would visit the family home and that I would continue to contact parents with any concerns.

Middle Phase: I visited the home when Joanne's attendance was 50%. In addition to their three children, Mr and Mrs C kept a boa constrictor in a glass case in the lounge, twenty-five snakes in their bedroom, three cats, two dogs and three rabbits. Mrs C told me that she bred rats to feed to the snakes as it was better than giving them frozen rats from the pet shop. I visited the home again when I took Joanne into school. Mr and Mrs C were both present. The reasons given for Joanne's poor attendance was that she suffers with an under active thyroid (she had an appointment with a consultant) and that she sometimes truants – either staying on the bus or going to the stables, mucking out her pony.

I visited the home again and spoke to Mr & Mrs C and Joanne. Apparently, Joanne often stayed on the bus rather than go to school. Joanne did not see the dangers of this. We agreed that I would speak to the HoY 8 regarding Joanne's allegations of bullying and of her finding schoolwork difficult. Joanne did not return to school as agreed and a letter was sent warning the parents that they may face prosecution for Joanne's continued poor attendance.

Termination Phase: Joanne's attendance continued to deteriorate and a letter was sent inviting parents to a Court Assessment Meeting to be held at the school. Mr C

attended the meeting and explained how Joanne often left home for school but truanted and on some occasions she overslept. I explained to Mr C that Joanne had been seen the previous day in Waitrose Supermarket with her friend when she should have been in school. We discussed the dangers of Joanne remaining on the bus when she should be in school. I suggested that if possible Mr or Mrs C should take Joanne to school, ensuring that she actually gets there. It was agreed that Joanne would return to school the following day and I would monitor her attendance until the end of term. She did not return.

Following the meeting I spoke to the Bus Company and expressed my concerns about Joanne remaining on the bus and travelling alone to Luton when she should alight at the School with other pupils. I asked for the bus driver to be made aware of this, as Joanne had said to me that she was a friend of the driver. I discussed my concerns with my supervisor. I continued to monitor Joanne's attendance, which had deteriorated to 8% - out of a possible 84 sessions, Joanne attended 10 sessions. The case was referred to the Court for prosecution, as the parents were not co-operating with the EWS and ensuring Joanne's regular attendance.

Outcome: Father attended Court, Mother sent apologies as she was feeling unwell. Both parents fined £50 each and £30 costs to pay (costs being awarded to the LEA for administrative charges). EWO continues to work with the family.

Case 4: Truant Year 9

Initial Phase: Bobby has been known to the EWS since November 1995. He has behaviour problems and receives support from the outreach worker for one hour each week. I first became involved with the family when a letter was sent regarding Bobby's persistent lateness. Bobby was referred to me again when he had attended only 19 out of a possible 40 school sessions. I arranged a home visit but when I arrived Mrs D said it was not convenient to speak to me. A second appointment was sent. Mrs D was present along with Bobby, sister and two family friends. Mrs D explained that Bobby has difficulty getting up and going to school as he goes to bed very late. We discussed earlier bedtimes and alarm clocks. She went on to say that Bobby does not get on with his Head of Year 9 and he was not in school that day as

his 'trousers were not dry'. It was agreed that a meeting would be arranged in school with the Head of Year.

Middle Phase: A meeting was arranged in school on with Bobby's Head of Year. Mrs D was invited but did not attend. Bobby's attendance continued to deteriorate and a letter was sent to Mrs D explaining the implications for her of her son's continued poor attendance. Mrs D was invited into School for a meeting with the Head of Year and myself, again she did not attend or contact me and as I did not have a telephone number for her I could not contact her.

The school later gave me Mrs D mobile telephone number and I spoke to her informing her that a court assessment meeting would be arranged. I contacted her again to advise Mrs D that following Bobby's exclusion from school she must contact the school secretary in order to arrange an appointment to discuss Bobby's re-admittance.

Termination Phase: A letter was sent to Mrs D dated inviting her to a Court Assessment Meeting. The CAM was held at the school but Mrs D did not attend. Bobby has not attended school for six weeks. Bobby's overall attendance rate for the academic year was 54%. During the period I worked with the family Bobby attended school on 38 occasions out of a possible 74 sessions. The case was referred to the Court and I hand delivered a summons to Mrs D.

Outcome: Mrs D. received a conditional discharge and £30 costs to pay. EWO continues to work with family.

Case 5: Truant Year 9

The School referred Zoë to the education welfare service as she had attended 25 sessions out of a possible 40 and staff were unable to contact Mrs E. Zoë is an able student with no special educational needs.

Initial Phase: I first contacted the family by letter arranging a home visit. Mrs E did not keep this appointment. Another appointment was sent to Mrs E for the following

week. Mrs E was at home when I called but had forgotten about the appointment and told me it was not convenient to talk as she was 'cooking the dinner'.

As Zoë's attendance did not improve and she was not in school for me to speak to her, I arranged a meeting to be held at the School. Zoë's head of year was to be present, giving Mrs E the opportunity to explain why Zoë had been absent and also to discuss any difficulties that Zoë might be experiencing. Mrs E did not attend or make contact.

Middle Phase: Zoë's attendance continued to deteriorate – during the following eight weeks her attendance was 46%. A warning letter was sent to Mrs E outlining the legal implications of Zoë's continued poor school attendance. Mrs E did not respond to this letter.

Termination Phase: A Court Assessment Meeting was held. Mrs E did not attend but on this occasion telephoned the school and explained to me that Zoë had hurt her leg and required hospital treatment. I told Mrs E that I would monitor Zoë's attendance over the next four weeks and if no improvement, I would contact her. Zoë's attendance improved during this period. However, during the following two weeks Zoë's attendance began to deteriorate and she missed complete weeks from school with no contact from Mrs E as to the reason why. A letter was sent to Mrs E inviting her to a second Court Assessment Meeting. However, she did not attend and did not attempt to make contact with the school or myself. Zoë's attendance continued to be poor – out of possible 176 school sessions, she attended 79. As Mrs E failed to co-operate with the school and the EWS, the case was referred to Court for prosecution.

Outcome: Mrs E. did not attend Court and was fined £30 in her absence plus £30 costs to pay.

Case 6: Truant Year 10

Sophie is an able student and has no special educational needs. She is very sociable and had a part in the school production but due to her non-attendance at rehearsals the part was given to another pupil.

Initial Phase: Sophie's attendance began to cause concern when she began to miss odd days from school. The HoY explained to me that Sophie had always disliked school and although some absences were due to genuine sickness, most were due to Sophie truanting. I arranged to meet Sophie and her HoY for an informal chat. We discussed the problem of her poor attendance and Sophie became very upset. She explained that her father had left home a few years ago. He was now living at home, but each time her parents argue she is afraid that he will leave home again. It was agreed that Sophie would speak to her Head of Year if she had any anxieties regarding her schoolwork and I would continue to monitor her attendance.

Middle Phase: Sophie's attendance improved for two weeks but started to deteriorate following the Easter break. I arranged to visit the family at home where I spoke at length to Mrs F, as Sophie was not present. It was suggested at this meeting that Sophie should meet with me once a week to discuss any problems she may have in school. I sent Sophie an appointment to meet the following week.

I met with Sophie as arranged. She came into school at 10.30 and was not in her uniform as she said she was feeling unwell but came in to attend our meeting. She told me that she did not need to see me on a regular basis, as everything was 'fine now' in school and at home. She would return to school tomorrow if she felt better. Mrs F was aware of this.

Sophie's attendance improved slightly but she was regularly arriving very late for school. I sent a letter to Mr and Mrs F explaining the legal implications regarding Sophie's poor school attendance. I received a letter from Mr F explaining that he and his wife were finding it impossible to make Sophie attend school regularly.

Termination Phase: I visited the home and spoke to Mr and Mrs F. I explained to Sophie the seriousness of her continued poor attendance and I would monitor the first four weeks of the new term and if there were no improvement a Court Assessment Meeting (CAM) would be arranged. I telephoned Mrs F to confirm that she had received notification of the CAM to be held.

A CAM was held at the School as Sophie's attendance was below 50%, both parents attended. Sophie was also present and said that she now felt happier at home and school stating she would be making particular effort to get up and get to school on time. I spoke to Mr F on the telephone to express my concern that Sophie's attendance had not improved and a home visit was arranged in order that we may discuss the local education authority's application for an Education Supervision Order (ESO).

I visited the home and spoke to Mr and Mrs F. Sophie was also present. We discussed the ESO application and how it would affect the family. I explained that they would all be expected to attend court and that includes Sophie, as the Magistrate would want to speak to her.

Sophie expressed a wish to change schools but Mr F pointed out that if Sophie could not attend this School regularly and punctually (which is near the family home) it is unlikely that she would attend another school.

The reason that the LEA would apply for an ESO rather than a prosecution was that both Mr and Mrs F had fully co-operated with school staff and myself but were unable to ensure Sophie's regular attendance. Therefore, it was felt that a Court order would provide the support, framework and impetus for both parents and Sophie to ensure regular attendance at school in order that she reaches her full potential. An application was made to the Family Court for an ESO.

Outcome: 12 month Education Supervision Order was issued. EWO continues to support the pupil.

Case 7: School Refuser Year 10

Kirsty was referred to the EWS because she had not attended school for four weeks. She had been unable to attend school due to a throat infection but when she was due to return she developed, according to Mrs H (mother), a stomach bug. Kirsty had always attended school regularly and this was unusual for her. The head of year (HoY) 10 was very concerned and asked if I would visit. Overall, out of 40 school sessions she had not attended any.

Initial Phase: I sent an appointment to the family but Mrs H phoned to cancel, as this was an inconvenient time. We agreed another date/time. I visited the family home and spoke to Kirsty and her Mrs H. After a long talk it transpired that a girl in another form group was bullying Kirsty. Apparently it had started over Kirsty going out with a lad who was an ex-boyfriend of this girl. Kirsty was fearful of going back to school as the girl and her friends would gang up on her. I suggested that we meet with Kirsty's HoY to discuss how we could resolve this situation.

Middle Phase: A meeting in school was arranged and Mrs H attended alone as Kirsty refused to come into the school. The HoY said she had spoken to the girl involved and tried to reassure Mrs H that this could be resolved. Mrs H said that Kirsty wanted to change schools and she had made enquiries as to where there were vacancies. I expressed my concern that Year 10 is not a good time to transfer schools as students are in the middle of GCSE coursework. Mrs H said she would contact the school at the end of the week with a decision.

Mrs H contacted the school to say that after discussing transferring schools, Kirsty had decided she would like to return and not transfer. Mrs H and Kirsty were invited to meet with the HoY in order to discuss a re-integration programme (Kirsty had now been out of school for seven weeks) but Mrs H contacted me to say Kirsty was unwell and she [Mrs H] was taking her to the family doctor. I arranged to visit the family home the following day.

When I visited the home, Kirsty was sitting on the sofa with a quilt covering her legs. She looked depressed and when she spoke she was very tearful. Apparently, Dad had left home eight weeks ago and visited at weekends. Mrs H explained that the doctor had prescribed a mild anti-depressant for Kirsty and recommended she be kept at home until the next appointment in two weeks. I explained to Mrs H that in order to authorise Kirsty's absence a medical certificate was required. The school did not receive a medical certificate therefore the absence remained unauthorised.

I was in regular contact with Mrs H but Kirsty's condition did not improve. At the next appointment the doctor prescribed Kirsty further medication and referred her to

the Child and Family clinic for counselling. I asked Mrs H to sign a form giving her consent for me to contact the doctor. I needed to clarify details regarding Kirsty's illness and how long, in the doctor's opinion would Kirsty be absent from school. If it were likely to be weeks, then the LEA would provide home tuition.

Termination Phase: I wrote to the family doctor. A response was received two weeks later stating that he recommended Kirsty be kept at home until she has her appointment with the Child and Family clinic. I spoke to Kirsty's head of year and arranged for schoolwork to be sent home until the clinic's assessment.

Following the assessment at the clinic I spoke to the psychiatrist at the clinic and asked him to put his diagnosis in writing to me. Mrs H. was aware of this. The psychiatrist stated Kirsty would attend the clinic over the next few months to address her depression and that it would be beneficial for her to receive, if possible, home tuition until she was able to return to school.

The necessary forms were completed and a referral was made to the Tuition Service.

Outcome: The LEA provided 4 hours of home tuition each week. To be reviewed every six weeks. The EWO continued to monitor via the home tuition tutor.

Case 8: Truant Year 10

Luke was known to the EWS for his poor punctuality but had always maintained regular attendance. However following the Christmas break Luke did not return and no message was received from his parents. The HoY asked his friends if they knew why Luke had not returned but as far as they knew he had visited family in Liverpool at Christmas and they had not seen him since.

Initial Phase: Luke was referred to me after two weeks of no contact. I visited the family home but could get no answer. I left a card with my contact details. Mrs J, Luke's mother contacted me the next day. She said the family had been away and Luke would return to school the next day. Luke did not arrive at school so I visited the home later that day. Mrs J opened the door and invited me in. Luke was watching television. Dad was at work.

Following a long chat with Luke it transpired that he was reluctant to return to school as he felt he had missed a lot of work. I explained that it was possible with the help of the teachers to catch up at this stage. I arranged to meet Luke in school the next day at 9.00 so that we could speak to his HoY.

Middle Phase: Luke did meet me in school and we spoke to the HoY. It was arranged that Luke would stay in at lunch breaks for this week in order to catch up with work missed. The HoY would speak to the teachers involved and oversee the work programme. Luke did not return the next day. I contacted Mrs J and she informed me Luke was feeling unwell but would return the next day. He did not.

The following week Luke had not returned to school. I visited the home but no one was home. I left a card. The following week, as I had received no response and the school had had no contact from Mrs J, I visited the home again, but no one was home. As Luke had not returned to school and I was concerned, I knocked at a neighbour's door who told me Luke and his parents were visiting family in Liverpool. I left a card.

Two weeks later the school had still not heard from Luke or his mother. I wrote to Mr and Mrs J expressing my concerns at Luke's absence. I heard from Mrs J two weeks later when she returned from Liverpool. Luke was still in Liverpool. The family planned to move to be near family. Mrs J was hoping to exchange her council house with another similar in Liverpool.

As there had been no contact from Mr or Mrs J for three weeks I visited the home. As there was no reply I left a card. The following day I received a call from the new occupier of the house. Apparently she had exchanged her house in Liverpool with Mrs J and gave me the address.

Termination Phase: I contacted the local housing department to verify that this exchange had taken place. A housing officer confirmed this. I then wrote to Mrs J requesting that she contact Luke's school or myself in order that we could record their new address etc. I also contacted the EWS covering the area where they lived

requesting an EWO contact the family. I wanted confirmation that Luke was now attending school in Liverpool.

The following week I received a call from both Mrs J and the EWS. Luke was attending a new school. Of course, this work could have been saved if Mrs J had informed the school of her move. The case was closed.

Outcome: Family moved home to another LEA. Details passed to EWS in new home location.

These case studies reflect the diversity of experience among pupils in the same non-attendance categories – in this case, truancy and school refuser. They indicate the type of case referred and the methods of intervention used. I worked with individual pupils and their families over a period of up to twelve weeks and in some case twenty-four weeks, providing support and advice. This was more intensive support offered to pupils with identified attendance problems. As the cases progressed I became more aware of how important it is to conduct an assessment and set goals within the first couple of meetings. During the middle phase of implementation, I was constantly reviewing the progress with a view to reaching the termination stage.

Over the two-year period 184 non-attendance referrals were made to me, this was just under 30% of the school population. Each of the 184 referred were visited at least once and the task-centred model of practice was applied. In 178 cases I was able to bring the cases to closure using this approach but six cases remained open. The cases described above are not typical of all cases but they do illustrate how some cases take up a considerable amount of time and it is not always possible to reach the 'termination phase' of Reid's model. In addition, time was spent writing up records and reports and consulting with my supervisor on the progress of the case.

The successful re-integration of long-term absentees depends on the negotiation skills of the EWO with school staff. If a pupil has had a substantial amount of absence the return to school can be fraught with obstacles. The first one being contact with teaching staff. It is important to engage school staff in the process of re-integration as it could be an off the cuff remark from a teacher, such as 'glad you could grace us with your company' that will send a non-attender straight back out the door. What is crucial for

the successful reintegration is that the EWO negotiates changes in agreement with school staff so that the pupil returns to school with the knowledge there have been changes made to difficulties raised. The most effective aspect of this level of support is engaging the family in the process in order to change behaviour. One of the disadvantages of this intervention is that it is time consuming and will prevent the EWO from undertaking other interventions that would tackle a larger group of non-attenders. Individual casework is not advised by Government guidelines.

7.2.9 Whole School Approach

The cyclic process of action research allowed the project to develop through the 'self-reflective spiral of planning, implementing, evaluating and the re-planning and further implementing' (Kemmis & Taggart, 1988: 22). Each stage of the process was preceded by planning and followed by review thus enabling me, the researcher, to learn and to modify my plans. Throughout the second year of working within the school I continued to send letters to parents and invite them into school for meetings. Attendance at these meetings improved with over 50% of parents attending and, if not able to attend, telephoning through acknowledging the contents of the letter. There was a change of staff; 12 members of teaching staff left at the end of the summer term. Two heads of years were replaced and, with their commitment to tackling non-attendance, I was able to work in partnership with them and improve attendance figures. I was not simply a participant observer, but an active change agent.

Overall, during the two years of cover the attendance figures improved by almost 6%. It would be difficult to pinpoint a single initiative that was responsible but it would be true to say that the implementation of the whole school approach certainly contributed to this improvement. The effectiveness was ascribed to the immediacy, consistence and persistence of schemes, as well as their ability to raise awareness. In order to improve a school's attendance figures the whole school community must be involved - from the head teacher through to the caretaker and cleaning staff. The whole school approach adopted:

Weekly consultation meetings with HOYs.

Half-termly meetings with senior management.

Late arrivals to report to senior teacher to sign in.

3 times late and a detention issued.

First day response to absences.

Letters to parents highlighting absence rate.

Inviting parents into school for meeting to discuss their child's poor attendance.

Year Group Assemblies.

Group work with targeted groups.

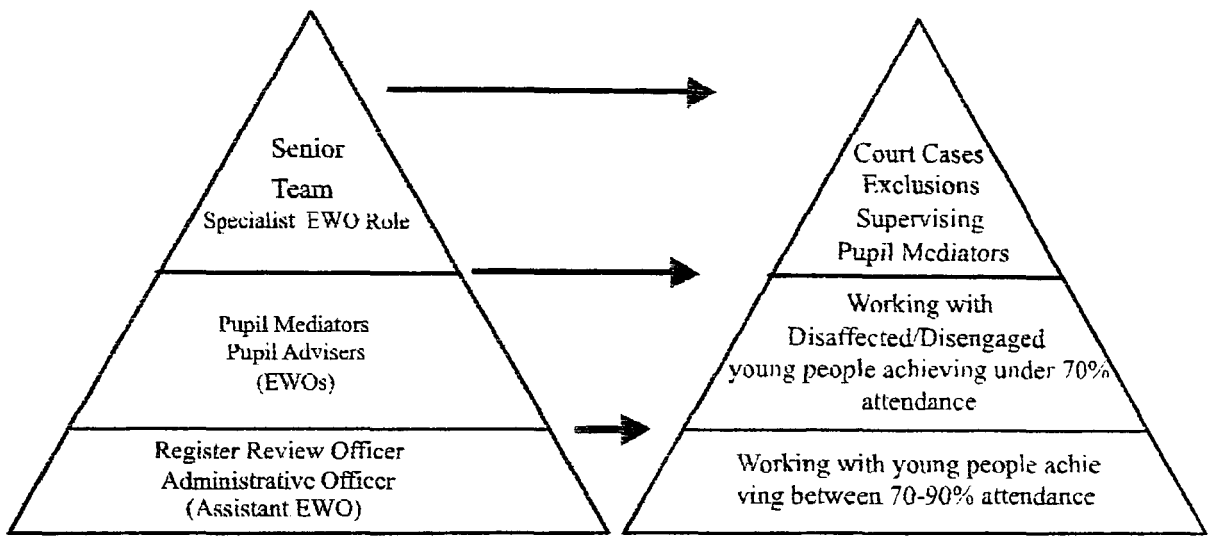
PSE to individual tutor groups e.g. bullying workshops.

Secondary transition support for Year 7s.

The whole school approach encompasses the whole school population and involves planning and organisation but once in place the message is clear to each pupil – you are expected to attend school punctually and regularly unless you are medically unfit. In order to support the chronic non-attenders the EWO must adopt a more one-to-one approach but generally it is more productive to concentrate on those pupils achieving 70-90% attendance.

Therefore in an attempt to support the whole school population the findings of this study suggest the role of the EWO can be divided into a three -tiered model (figure 14, page 218). The first tier is an unskilled administrative role, checking registers, telephoning and writing letters to parents reminding them of their legal responsibilities. perhaps referred to as Register Review Officers. The caseload would be the whole school population.

Figure 14: Three-tiered model of practice



The second tier EWO is a skilled role working with the chronic non-attenders on a one-to-one basis, negotiating and mediating on their behalf alternative provision and liaising with other agencies e.g. social services. The EWO would provide support to the young person as well as providing a link with a multi-disciplinary team and engaging their support if required. The caseload would be a maximum of 15 (the same as social workers) individual referrals enabling the officers to spend more time working with the young person. The third tier is the senior team comprising of a manager, court officer, child protection officer and an exclusions officer. The caseload would be the school population of the LEA. The model is best described as a 'triage model of practice'.

7.3 Summary

In order to effectively address the issue of attendance, schools must do a basic minimum, starting with contacting parents on the first day of absence. However in schools under pressure, these figures are not comparable or accurate. It was observed

during the study (section 7.2.2) that pupils were not always monitored as they arrived at school. Some were counted as absent when they were late and some turned up just to register before leaving during the day. Pupils were typically targeted for intervention because their attendance fell below a certain level.

By itself this is not a successful intervention, though it has to be done. A phone call immediately has more success. Parents often refuse to attend meetings at the school – not surprisingly if they themselves were truants and see it as hostile territory. Letters to parents are official and in formal language, and the parents may have difficulty with this level of literacy. Or they may collude with the child and influence the child, not wanting him or her to reject family values and lead a mainstream life. It is evident from data gathered about the initiatives aimed at improving attendance that the EWO operates autonomously. As can be seen from the 'cycle of interventions' the EWO has a number of approaches to tackle the issue of non-attendance. Working within a framework of government legislation and bureaucratic guidelines the officer has to find a balance of practice. Achieving a balance between the enforcement and welfare dimensions of the EWO's role was problematic. However, it was established that with rigorous monitoring of casework and focusing on the problem presented i.e. non-attendance rather than attempting to resolve family problems, improvements were recorded. Government targets and consequently LEA targets for improving school attendance have major implications for the EWS.

Data collected during this phase contributed to the suggestion that the role of the EWO could effectively be developed into a three-tiered model as described in figure 14 (page 218). Managers may wish to consider a triage approach to non-attendance. This is supported by evidence from the initiatives summarised above. For example, attendance data analysis, weekly consultations with school staff to check registers and sending letters to parents regarding pupils who fail to achieve 90% attendance are basically administrative tasks and can be carried out by an administrator/ register review officer. Furthermore, interventions such as interviewing parents with the HoY present or perhaps without and writing to parents e.g. raising concerns about lateness and/or attendance are interventions that specifically target parents reminding them of their legal responsibilities and implications if they do not comply.

In fact only three initiatives, targeting individuals and groups by providing personal and social education within the class, supporting individual pupils back into school and arranging a non-attenders group actually focus on engaging with the pupil which seems ludicrous considering it is their education after all. My experience during this phase of the research has been a revelation in that children and young people when referred to the EWS seem to play insignificant roles. Despite the indications of the 1989 Children Act, they are not always consulted to determine their feelings or expectations. Children and young people are at the centre of attendance intervention in the sense that without them and their needs, there is no reason for the service in the first place. A good starting point for resolving school attendance issues is to establish first and foremost the thoughts and feelings of the child not the parents.

There is no doubt that EWS managers must look to adapt and develop the service in response to the demands of the tasks and duties of its practitioners. I found one of the major qualities of using the action research approach to be that it enabled me to obtain precise knowledge from a particular situation and purpose. The goal of my action research was improvement in EWO practice.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

According to the DfEE (1999: 3) the education welfare service (EWS) has a major role to play in providing an essential service for children and young people. Achieving its potential will require a consensus on role and best practices. As discussed in sections 6.3.1-6 data collected indicates that effective interventions are being made by part of the service, for example but there is also a need to develop initiatives that involve engaging the young person in the education process rather than focusing on family circumstances.

The law requires young people between the ages of 5 and 16 to attend school or another place of education, which includes home schooling. Whatever the establishment it is a requirement that pupils are taught a basic minimum about communication, literacy and knowledge of the outside world. The costs of educational underachievement are huge, not just in terms of lost opportunity, unfulfilled potential for the individual and reduced quality of life, crucial though these are, but also in the long term financial costs to the economy and society generally. A poor understanding or lack of reading and writing skills is correlated with a poorer life (DfEE, 2000; Connexions 2000) not necessarily financial, but also in aspects such as career choice, in housing, in health, the satisfaction that comes from following one's innate talents and freedom from a criminal record and time in prison. The major focus of the role of the EWS is on school attendance but the challenge for the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) is to remove barriers to learning, ensuring effective participation in learning, raising aspirations and providing an effective foundation for lifelong learning and sustained employability.

The government has clearly indicated that it wishes to prevent and limit absences from school and at present the task is delegated to local education authorities (LEAs) that employ EWOs to undertake this statutory duty. This study has investigated the management of this responsibility and whether the present system could be improved. Furthermore, it has determined how this particular group of professional people interact and operate with the school and the non-attender, what skills, strengths and values they

bring to this partnership, that enable them to effectively re-integrate the pupil to school, and investigates what the EWOs should be doing, why they should be doing it, and how they actually do it.

The object of this study has been to gain a new understanding of this process by learning from detailed accounts by respondents, and from field notes taken during interviews and action research. The need is to establish the concept of effective practice of the professional working with the school non-attender with a view to developing national standardised practice guidelines. How can the EWO effectively maximise school attendance rates for the individual child, individual school and individual LEA? The issues that have been addressed are:

- How can EWOs become more effective?
- What actually works in improving attendance?
- What needs to change in order to improve effectiveness?

The intention of this study has dealt with these issues by clarifying the remit of the EWS and of EWOs and to consider if the service is effectively organised to deliver its remit. The debate in England between running the education welfare service with a social work focus, where officers befriend and support the family plus pupil or with an educational focus supporting the pupil and his or her education, is a bureaucratic way of looking at matters. Department for Education and Skills (DfES) officials and local authority managers have done little to integrate the data that does exist or to learn from it. Without incorporating and analysing data, the arguments have got nowhere despite continuing to consume time, paper and ink.

In previous chapters discussion has been kept close to the research data, dealing with a variety of methodological issues and presenting the findings as objectively as possible. In this final chapter, the approach to the findings will be in a more speculative manner with the process of interpretation being a more subjective one.

8.2 Discussion of Findings

This investigation has shown that there is a wide variance between the local authorities involved and in the success being achieved in combating absences of children from school. There is also a difference, as discussed in sections 6.3.1-6 between the

successes achieved by individual education welfare officers. It is clear that certain changes are needed if progress in combating truancy is to be made, and in this section the author sets out aspects, which require attention. These aspects can be grouped into three key areas: clarifying the role of the EWO, training and evaluating the outcomes of intervention.

8.2.1 The Role of the Education Welfare Officer.

An issue that was under discussion throughout this study was the lack of clarity regarding the EWO's role. This continues to be a problem. The dominant function of the EWS is to investigate children's absence from school and to promote good attendance (Ofsted, 1995). However, the aim of the job is interpreted in many ways. There is no clear direction here. Some officers believed themselves to be advocates for the welfare of the child plus the family. These tend to have a social service background and are willing to spend time looking after the needs of the family in general. Much of this had no demonstrable effect on the child's school attendance.

Unanimously, the sample of EWOs in this study believe the aim of their job is to work with the pupil to improve his or her attendance. Yet, data gathered indicates that a majority of an EWO's working day is spent working with school staff and meeting with parents. Recent government guidelines (DfEE, 1999) have re-emphasised that within the wide range of work the prime function of education welfare services (EWSs) is still the enforcement of school attendance. Findings of this study suggests that although EWSs concentrated on attendance EWOs spent time on other tasks. For example, it became apparent during discussions that EWOs were spending time meeting demands not met by other local authority departments, in particular social work tasks. High levels of individual decision-making regarding working practice were recorded during interviews with EWOs.

Officially the EWO's role is to encourage and even enforce regular attendance. According to government guidelines (DfEE, 1999) the EWO's aim is to identify the school non-attender and to effectively engage with the child/family so as to avoid sanctions. Often the EWO acts as a bridge between home and school. The 'bridging' aspect of education welfare work has been regarded as the great strength of the EWO

whose remit, to date, has included both school attendance and welfare help. However, this role is open to interpretation. Working against a backdrop of government legislation, operational guidelines and pupil/parent expectations. the officer juggles between this dual role of social control agent and social welfare. While schools are concerned with developing capacities for social functioning i.e. preparing pupils for citizenship and working life, the education welfare services (EWS) are concerned with social breakdown i.e. investigating family breakdown and also enforcing school attendance. Data suggested that it would be more effective if the EWO concentrated on one area, which is school attendance; working in partnership with the school to focus on resolving school issues that are preventing regular attendance instead of undertaking this dual role of law enforcer and social worker.

This study has found that the EWO's client is not the pupil who should be at the very centre of the issue (i.e. in regard to their truancy), but the school and the parent. EWOs are often deluded in thinking the client is the pupil, but the greater part of their work is clearly with the adults involved such as parents and school staff. An EWO spends the best part of the day discussing the non-attender with the adults involved but in some cases, not enough time is spent discussing the non-attendance with the pupil. The pupil's views may be considered but it is to the parents the EWO directs the implications of the truancy. The child or young person is not an active participant and more consideration should be given to how they can become part of the resolution process.

Truancy figures indicate an increase and the government has set a target to improve school attendance. To date the Education Welfare Service (EWS) has been situated in either the education department or the social service department of a local authority and the effectiveness of the service is questionable depending on local resources. EWSs situated in either education or social service departments have not been effective by this criterion.

I accept there are differing levels of social work involvement. EWOs undertake diagnostic and assessment tasks, which in turn require training to manage this effectively. Therefore, in order to gain respect from and to be on par with other professionals, an EWO needs to be of equal professional status to that of other agencies

working with non-attenders. Certainly an EWO in a school needs to be of equivalent status to a teacher. This requires a degree-level qualification.

If the EWS were to be placed with social services it would lose its independence and there is also a real possibility that education welfare officers (EWOs) would become social work assistants carrying out the unskilled tasks the social worker does not have time to conduct e.g. contacting other agencies such as housing departments or administrative tasks. Alternatively, if the EWS remains placed within an education department it could be missing an ideal opportunity to make the transition from being the 'Cinderella' of public services to a support service meeting the needs of the 21st century youth. Hitherto, the EWS has failed, overall, to engage with school non-attenders and reduce truancy figures.

A suggestion that evolved from this study may be to place the EWS within a department trained to deal with disengaged young people e.g. the youth service. If the EWS were to be placed within the youth service there are many services available that are not fully accessed by those practitioners working with young people at the moment, e.g. information and advice centres, projects aimed at raising their self-esteem, and, for example, involving young people in music projects and residential projects. Of course the EWO could be based within the school, which as discussed in section 1.8 does allow schools to respond more quickly to non-attendance but this would be at risk of EWOs losing an element of independence as many parents see them as a separate professional from school staff. Additionally, the EWO may feel alienated from his/her team and would not benefit from daily interactions with colleagues e.g. discussions about workloads, training provision or even a home visit that did not go very well.

Now is the time to consider an alternative provision of service in keeping with the government's proposal of the Connexions youth support initiative (Connexions, 2000). The intention is for EWOs to become part of a core team, a multi-disciplinary team, supporting young people but it is too early to tell how the exact mechanics of the relationship will work. Perhaps, by locating the EWS within the youth service the focus of the work would be on the young person rather than working with the whole family. It would be better placed to address the needs of the non-attender, offering them advice and direction that is not readily available in schools and certainly not from EWOs.

The need is to re-invent the old style school board man to become the new style 'pupil mediator'. A register review officer can monitor school attendance figures. These are two separate roles; one role requires a skilled practitioner, the other a skilled administrator. A century ago the school board man was chasing truants who were working when they should have been receiving an education. Now the EWO must look to adapt their practice to equip the non-attender with the skills necessary to join the labour force. It is important for the training of an EWO to focus on what impacts on and engages the young person, and training must focus on learning and achievement for the young person.

The status of the education welfare officer is sometimes a problem. Dealing with more highly qualified professionals in schools, social services and courts was occasionally found to be intimidating and difficult to handle. EWOs reported that they spend much time on low-level jobs like letter writing. It is clear that the automation of routine tasks is needed for administrative tasks to be eliminated and the staff freed for more worthwhile tasks. IT training should be mandatory, and systems of database analyses should be accessed in order to evaluate intervention outcomes.

The title of the education welfare officer should reflect the tasks of the job rather than the misleading titles of Education *Welfare* Officer or Education *Social* Worker [author's emphasis]. The suggestion of plain 'truancy officer' sounds old-fashioned, as there are many more aspects to the job than the truancy part, with particular importance, preventative work in schools. The title presents an opportunity to drop the split between social services and education. The new title should sound friendly, professional and objective to the pupils who get involved with the officer, and to teachers and court personnel, and a title such as 'pupil mediator' or plain 'mediator' would be appropriate. The mediator would not prosecute offenders, but would pass on cases to a court officer, or to child protection as necessary.

8.2.2 Training for the Education Welfare Officer.

We have seen in previous chapters how the role of the Education Welfare Officer is to encourage, enable and enforce but how they should achieve this spectrum of tasks

is not documented. There are no standardised guidelines of practice. The findings presented in this study raise a number of key issues that impact on the working practice of the education welfare officer (EWO). More than 50% of respondents' view of their role differed with others including that of the present government. They perceived their role to be working on behalf of the non-attender and their families, when in fact government guidelines stipulate the EWO's role should be that of working in partnership with schools. The problem here would appear to be the lack of clear guidelines from management and the fact that the training received does not reflect the tasks of the job.

How an officer actually performs his or her duties not only depends on the values and resources available from the LEA where the child lives, but also depends largely on the officer's own personality and values that he brings to his working practice. By developing social relationships, by interacting with the school, child and family, and other agencies, the officer is able to explore and analyse the situation and make recommendations.

The working practice of the EWO varies depending on the individual LEA's values and resources. It is evident from initiatives investigated that the contribution the EWO makes to improving attendance is both diverse and sometimes dictatorial. To achieve a balance between the enforcement and welfare aspects of the role and to avoid confusion, EWOs normally clarify their dual role with parents during the first meeting making clear the legal aspects of education welfare service intervention as well as advice and support that is available.

Nevertheless, it is the LEA who is the employer and it is the school with which the EWO should be working. This study found many EWOs operating in a contradictory way. In some instances, cases monitored recorded the EWO working closely with individual families, which can be time consuming, as opposed to working towards improving the attendance figures of the whole school. This highlights the need for all LEAs to be clear about the role of the EWO. Each LEA taking part in this study had a different policy for the deployment and priorities of their EWS. If the focus of the education welfare service is to assist and advise school staff on strategies to improve attendance then good practice requires clear LEA policy guidelines directing delivery

of tasks (only one authority participating in the study provides guidelines), rather than the current system of inconsistency in practice.

Should educational welfare be a service with proper resources, training and development in its own right, or should its specialised skills be absorbed into multi-disciplinary teams serving school and community? There is a dilemma between LEAs retaining the expertise or giving expertise to schools but keeping back some corporate oversight of quality and the need to take legal action. If resources were delegated to schools the aim would be for EWOs to work alongside all agencies and cover primary and early years.

National guidelines are clearly needed. National standards need to be developed at school and community level. There is a dire need for standards to be set and for EWOs to clearly understand their objectives. The training and development of the EWO should have the meeting of children and young people's educational needs as their central focus. Additionally, it is important to reflect on the range of strategies adopted to address non-attendance and consider whether they are achieving an appropriate balance between preventative and remedial approaches.

Throughout this study evidence has highlighted the dichotomy of service, from the job title in that some EWSs refer to practitioners as Education Welfare Officers while others refer to their practitioners as Education Social Workers; to the training received reflecting the preference of the Diploma in Social Work or the Diploma in Education Welfare Studies being the recognised qualification; through to the techniques employed to address the non-attendance. How can the EWO possibly be effective operating under such diverse circumstances? The focus of the role should be good practice. Now is a good time for the professional associations to get together and agree on the future for the EWS rather than leaving it for the government to make those decisions for them.

The research data could be analysed in terms of the low self-esteem in the profession, which is due perhaps to lack of clarity and support in the role that in turn affects their ability to perform effectively. The underpinning philosophy and objective is for the practitioner working with school non-attenders to return them to full-time education with the opportunity and support they need to succeed as individuals. Data in this study

has clearly highlighted two roles of the EWO as being a law enforcer and a pupil mediator. Two separate employees should undertake these roles in order that the intervention put in place is strengthened rather than weakened by the practitioner fulfilling a dual role. If the EWO concentrates on one role s/he is able to prioritise, but by continuing to undertake both the law enforcer and the social worker aspects of the job the result is inefficiency as the officer is watering down their skills to accommodate the dual role. The role must be clarified not only to the officer but also to the pupil, school and LEA.

Achieving a balance between social control (the traditional approach) and the social justice (supportive) aspect of the job requires skill and training. This dual role has been constant throughout the history of the EWS and is now almost a characteristic of the service. Training and development must reflect the main task of the service that is improving school attendance. Encouraging education welfare officers (EWOs) to focus on the purpose of the job must be the aim, rather than considering themselves social workers, or alternatively focus on educational aspects of a young person, rather than the social circumstances of the family.

Many teachers have little understanding or training about non-attendance. Cases are consequently then referred to the educational welfare service (EWS) but findings in this study highlight the fact that EWOs are not fully trained to resolve educational problems. The national curriculum is geared towards academic achievement and not all pupils are interested in modern languages, science or engineering. Some need a more general vocational curriculum. A trained EWO should be equipped to negotiate on behalf of the school non-attender. For example, if a pupil truants from school, rather than send them back to exactly the same regime, an EWO should be able to discover the problem and negotiate with school staff a modified timetable or, in the cases of 14-16 year olds, a college place or an extended work experience placement. As discussed in sections 1.3 and 2.2.4, poor attendance is a multi-causal problem requiring multi-faceted approaches to deal with it. The impact an EWO has on an individual case depends on the working practice style adopted by the individual officer.

Furthermore, training provided is not reflecting the duties undertaken. For instance, respondents reported attending court and child protection training but do not find it

useful. This may be because these particular duties are not part of the EWOs daily tasks or the practitioner does not get the opportunity to put training into practice and therefore does not feel the benefits of the training. Moreover, data from the questionnaires indicates that training is concentrated in the early years of an EWO's career. There is little evidence of continued professional development, particularly with part-time practitioners. The reasons for this could be that the EWS does not provide training relevant to the role so therefore the EWO does not take up the opportunity to attend a specific training session, or the part-time EWO does not have the time to attend a half or a whole-day training session.

EWOs need professional accredited training, with a programme of reflective practice and assessment. Teacher education in 1970-80 changed from certificates to degrees, while nursing qualifications changed in the 1990s and have become degree qualifications. Professional educational training relevant to EWOs i.e. the educational needs of the child is required, and training should include the psychology of human development as well as aspects of school life including curricular approaches, the range of subject options, pastoral systems, career guidance and disciplinary policies (see Appendix F: 266). Training should not only provide learning opportunities but on-going developmental facilities.

So, how do we get good practice introduced? What are the barriers and processes? If, as one manager said, learning and achievement is what the EWS is about, and the underpinning skills are social work skills, then we need to reflect this in the training of practitioners working with non-attenders and disaffected young people. We need to equip them with the necessary skills to enter the labour force. Preventative work and opportunities to be creative and pro-active were valued by most respondents. Training should reflect skills required overall not just social work aspects. It would be more cost effective for the EWS, and more beneficial to the non-attender, for the EWO to be pro-active to attendance levels rather than reactive to non-attendance problems by which time the problem can be too engrained to bring about a change.

This study provides a contemporary framework to view and evaluate effective education welfare service practices. From this framework, indicators such as training ensure professionalism; organisational structure ensures a professionalised service that

in turn drives operational practice, the *modus operandi* of the EWO. The programme of training is vital as it informs EWO practice from which an approach is selected. This of course, influences the outcome of intervention. To date, there have been no performance indicators in the service. In order to provide management information it is vital they be introduced to measure the outcomes of EWS intervention. Attendance data must be collected to record the number of pupils who are referred to the EWS (and their level of attendance) as well as the numbers of absentees returned to education. There must be a method of setting targets over time and it would be helpful if all LEAs combined to standardise requirements, and to share information.

The use of performance indicators enables EWS management to collect relevant data to inform decisions regarding the plans for more effective use of staff. By implementing an effective review and monitoring system decisions can be made that lead to an improved consultation and evaluation process, resulting in improved attendance levels in schools.

How do we put performance indicators in place to measure success and achievement by the service? What should the EWS be measuring with regard to its effectiveness? As discussed in section 6.6, specific objectives of a performance indicator database could be percentage of cases referred to EWOs, average improvement in attendance levels of cases referred to EWOs and in order to measure of value for money the recording of ratio of EWOs to total pupil population plus the cost per pupil (EWS staffing budget/total number of pupils).

Education welfare officers must be aware of what they have done that is making a difference, and the outcome must be measured. This can be done by logging the attendance as the case is referred, and at regular intervals. If there is no improvement in the attendance level following EWO intervention then refer the case to the Courts. In order to measure the impact of the service in an objective way, performance measures and targets must be established. It is important to adopt evidence-based practice to justify the existence of the service.

8.2.3 Methods of Intervention.

The data analysed suggests support for the notion of two distinct types of EWO working practice – the traditional school board approach and the supportive approach. It depends on the values and attitudes of individual officers as to their interaction with clients and other professionals. The officer decides the level of intervention. Liaison, monitoring co-ordination and direct intervention skills are of major importance in the role of EWO. National guidelines should clearly state what the role of the EWO is; it should be to work with the young person, the non-attender, and focus on the task of resolving attendance issues for that young person within the framework of working in partnership with schools to advise them on their systems and procedures to improve school attendance.

It is evident from discussions about initiatives aimed at improving attendance that the EWO operates autonomously. As can be seen from the 'cycle of interventions' the EWO has a number of approaches to tackle the issue of non-attendance. Working within a framework of government legislation and operational guidelines the officer has to find a balance of practice. Achieving such a balance between the enforcement and welfare dimensions of the EWO's role, were found at times to be problematic. However, it was found that with rigorous monitoring of casework and focusing on the problem presented i.e. non-attendance rather than attempting to resolve family problems, improvements were recorded. What has become clear is that in order to achieve true inclusion and higher levels of attainment, it is necessary to establish an appropriate balance between attendance and welfare support. There is a need to re-establish the role of the EWO and to be clear about the boundaries of intervention and when to refer to non-educational agencies to achieve the well being of pupils and their families.

To date, interventions such as prosecutions or undertaking a supportive role with families have done little or nothing to reduce truancy figures. It seems incredible that a service that is charged with the task of encouraging young people back into the education system continue to deliver a disjointed service. The work of the EWO actually encompasses two roles i.e. the law enforcer and the supportive and it would be

more resourceful for LEAs to split the role allowing practitioners to concentrate on one specific area.

Parents still need to be reminded of their duty to ensure their child receives an education. But this is an administrative task rather than a professionally skilled job. Targeting those pupils who achieve only 60-80% attendance can be done by sending letters and by the first-day response technique. The majority of parents want their child to achieve, and they respond to reminders of their legal obligations, with the child often returning to regular attendance. Of course, there is a small minority of parents who are stressed out, have serious health and/or poverty problems that do not have the time or energy to devote to their child's attendance. Sadly, there are also some parents, who just do not see the benefits of education and pass their values on to their children who in turn cannot see the advantages of attending school.

Statistics show that at any one time 161,000 or 9% of young people between 16 and 18 years old are outside education, training or work for long periods after the school leaving age of 16 (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 8). This group of young people fall into an 'at risk' area i.e. young offenders, suicidal, special needs, disabilities, depression and pregnancy. It is this group of young people who the system has failed and who need to be identified early and worked with at a more intense level. This requires a skilled practitioner who can engage with a young person and make an assessment of his or her needs by taking a holistic approach. The core skills i.e. a commonality to all professions working with young people, should be fundamental skills of an education welfare officer (EWO).

An important aspect has been to ascertain how well EWOs resolve school attendance issues. Which processes, actions or interventions succeed in getting absentees back into school and which are not effective? The results reported in chapter 7 were a test of what was considered to be the most effective intervention. From evaluation results a model was developed incorporating the whole school approach. In this research EWOs working with school non-attenders spent the majority of their day meeting with school staff and conducting administrative tasks, they had little contact with individual pupils. Arguably, individual casework is time consuming and does not necessarily lead to the

ultimate aim of improving the whole school attendance. This is achieved by adopting the whole school approach and targeting those pupils with attendance between 60-85%.

Working with schools is at the heart of the job, and the majority of officers work with at least one secondary school. We have seen that relationships with schools and EWOs need improving. The EWO needs to be seen by schools as an objective professional who can be trusted and who will achieve something to their advantage. The research project undertaken with a researcher based in a school for intensive interventions showed that attendance can be improved if the whole school approach is utilised in its entirety.

Having examined (and practised) the general approaches and interventions that interviewees identified, the findings of this study have been presented as examples of effective working practice. One manager commented that many of the interventions suggested and carried out by EWOs were considered by schools to be a valuable resource, but in the light of the government targets to improve attendance the most cost-effective initiative, as applied by the researcher of this study is the whole-school response to non-attendance.

The findings in Chapter 7 concluded Working Practice typology C – Suggested/Preferred Government model – to be the 'Best Practice' model. This model encompasses the 'Whole School Approach', which basically focuses on whole-school attendance issues, such as the development of attendance policies and the introduction of whole-school strategies e.g. studying attendance data looking for emerging patterns; targeting specific groups e.g. vulnerable Year 7 secondary transition pupils, Year 10 pupils at risk of exclusion and Year 9 disaffected pupils; and presenting assemblies and PSE lessons as well as inviting all parents of those pupils with less than 80% attendance into the school for a meeting individually. This approach was used in a school in special measures and improved attendance figures from 84% to 89.9% over a twelve-month period. The whole-school approach was found to make more effective use of the EWOs time and enabled the school and EWO to take a broad view of attendance problems.

Furthermore, data collected during this phase contributed to a proposal that the role of the EWO could effectively be developed in a three-tiered model (see paragraph 8.3.2). Data analysed suggests there is sufficient evidence to design a strategy for intervention to cover all levels of non-attendance. This approach encompasses improvements to low-level non-attendance through to the chronic long-term absence. Evidence from this research highlights as to the extent to which the methods and skills of intervention discussed are implemented by the EWO. In spite of many positive attitudes to various interventions, some interviewees felt there were constraints that inhibited their efforts.

Workloads were frequently far too heavy to allow for time to develop effective implementation of a particular approach to non-attendance. Additionally, both the school and Education Welfare systems can be inflexible and unable to support change in dealing with non-attendance thus frustrating the implementation of an intervention strategy. Government targets and consequently LEA targets for improving school attendance have major implications for the education welfare service. EWS managers must look to adapt and develop the service in response to these demands. Effective intervention not only requires commitment from the EWO but managerial support and monitoring is an essential issue.

8.3 Overview

As we have seen in Chapter 2 a good deal of research has been devoted to the issues surrounding truancy and the conflict within the Education Welfare Service but, as we have seen from the review of earlier research, relatively little has been written about how to work effectively with the school non-attender. The level of intervention by 16 officers was studied, recording effective and ineffective practice. The motivating force to engage with the non-attender and their family is the initiative of the individual officers in their respective local authorities supported by the collective ethos of the team.

The prime focus of this study has been to discover how an officer engages with the school non-attender and how the policies put in place by the organisation play their part in that relationship along with resources available to the EWO. In fact, when we

consider the resources available to the EWO to resolve cases of non-attendance there are very few. In all authorities there are available one if not all of the following resources: pupil referral unit, college placements, extended work experience, reduced timetable or legal sanctions but in order to access them funding must first be secured. In some cases a pupil may remain out of education until funding for alternative provision is secured.

Although the service has been in existence for over 100 years, it lacks a coherent and consistent identity and it remains a low profile agency. The EWS is an under-researched area. The status and position of the EWS within the education hierarchy is not at all clear, while its task is also unclear and few of its officers are professionally trained, although there is a good deal of pragmatic knowledge. Issues regarding practitioner's title, training, supervision, skills required, qualifications and interventions have all been discussed leading to the conclusion that the EWS needs to be professionalised and basic administrative tasks need to be undertaken by an administrator thus allowing the EWO to concentrate on resolving the problem for the school non-attender by working in partnership with the school.

Central government legislation and policy has been theoretically driven towards parental choice and improving educational standards. The government continues to promote educational opportunities on an equitable basis, but to enable and empower the child to take up and benefit from education, the EWS must deliver a professional and consistent service, with officers being trained in a range of educational skills as well as social work skills.

Whether they live in Carlisle, Cardiff or Colchester, surely all pupils are entitled to receive the same level of service from their local EWS. In addition to statutory recognition, a co-ordinated approach is now required to consolidate existing good working practices. The author has observed that if one happens to live in one authority, you were more likely to be prosecuted for your child's non-attendance than if you lived in another authority where there were fewer prosecutions. This variation in practice is patently unacceptable. In some authorities, EWOs are not receiving sufficient direction from management. One officer interviewed had, in his five-year career, taken 34 cases to court, while another officer of 8 years experience had not yet referred a case to court,

but was more likely to help a parent arrange clothing grant or indeed, take second hand clothes to the women's refuge. The decision to refer cases to Court should not be left to the individual officer's style of practice but be made through following standardised guidelines. The process of improving school attendance is not about satisfying individual EWOs' ambition but discovering and applying interventions that get pupils back into school and switched on to education. It is about maximising in-school opportunities and attendance.

This study has examined the contribution that the education welfare service and numerous education welfare officers make to reduce truancy, identifying the range of interventions undertaken and evaluating examples of effective practice. It has also examined, as reported by EWOs, the tensions and dilemmas that the EWS currently faces, particularly those between the National Association of Social Workers in Education (NASWE), UNISON, and the National Centre for Education Welfare Studies (NCEWS). Unless these educational associations can agree and present a unified service, they cannot possibly offer a strong case to address the problems the service is facing. Education welfare has long been described as a 'Cinderella type of service' (Robinson, 1978: 165) but in order to help it to develop its full potential it will be necessary to implement a coherent and planned strategy to improve attendance with the child/young person at the very centre of its concerns.

The education welfare service needs to change to become more effective. It needs to have graduate-level qualified staff who can work with, on an equal footing, the schools which must be the focus of solving truancy. The title of the officers could usefully be unified and updated. Schools with a high level of unauthorised attendance should be pinpointed for intense work with the service, with a full-time presence of one or more EWS officer(s). In the short-term, a suggested solution would be for managers to audit the methods of gathering and recording attendance data and evaluate the EWOs practice. A priority must be to consider the approaches to improving attendance with a view to establishing a programme of intervention tailored to the needs of individual schools. Long-term solutions include reviewing the role and responsibilities of the EWS, establishing systems to share good and innovative practice as well as developing a national framework for training that incorporates multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working. The LEA should support this with resources and skills of resource

management. The LEA should also promote a unified and standardised set of performance indicators and disseminate information about successful strategies.

Given that this research has been mostly qualitative in both its method and reportage, it is important for the reader to note that suggestions made here are not a prescriptive blueprint for the delivery of the EWS. They are intended as a guide to inform the standardisation of operational practice for EWOs and the enhancement of practice. The status of the education welfare practitioner must be raised, and salary must reflect this. This can be achieved by the delegation of administrative tasks to an administrator, on a lower pay scale, thus releasing funds to pay a qualified and trained pupil mediator.

8.4 For Further Attention

The Connexions Service, a government initiative, was introduced in 2002, with personal advisers working with young people of 13-19 years old, advising them on all aspects of their lives. The Connexions Service is a single, coherent strategy aimed at all young people. It has been introduced in response to the need for a universal service to provide advice and support for all teenagers that focuses on the specific needs of young people. Surely, this is the very work that EWOs have been doing in addition to enforcing school attendance; this is an excellent opportunity to professionalise an established service not to reinvent it. The role of the EWO should be divided – enforcing attendance and supporting young people and their families. Let us strip away the enforcement role and allocate it to an administrator and concentrate on effectively engaging with these young people. The aim of EWS intervention should be to remove barriers to learning, ensuring effective participation in learning raising aspirations, and providing an effective foundation for lifelong learning and sustained employability.

School is a vital socialising agent where a child learns to respond to adults, to make friends with his or her own age group and to develop new skills. The EWO in returning the child to school is playing his or her part in endorsing social conformity. Here it can be said EWOs are performing a valuable function in the education system but for whose benefit – society or for the individual? It is necessary, for example, to investigate why some pupils do, and some pupils do not, progress to regular absenteeism. Why, as Huxtable asked in Section 6.3.1, are some children and young

people more resilient than others? What factors are involved around the specific pupil, the particular school and any other circumstances? If these factors can be determined, better prevention strategies can be devised. Close attention to specific cases is required. Therefore, in order to deliver effective practice there are three key areas for further research:

- Evaluation of mainstream EWO work and how they might diagnose the causes of non-attendance and address pupils' needs accordingly.
- Further research is needed to clarify the role of the EWO i.e. whether a greater impact may be achieved by promoting schools' management of absence and behaviour. Thus leading to EWOs providing strategic advice and guidelines to schools rather than concentrating on individual pupil/s and their families.
- Investigation into the question of specialisation is required and recommended. Specialisation may well be an effective tool but there is little experience to draw on to prove this is the case. This aspect should be further examined.

The research included in this study has been wide ranging, and has covered the work of the education welfare officer and his or her standing in the community. The main aim has been to gain a new understanding of the process applied to working with the school non-attender, by learning from detailed accounts by respondents, and from field notes taken during observations and action research. It is important to establish a concept of effective practice of the professional working with the school non-attender, with a view to developing national standardised practice guidelines. The investigation considered what Education Welfare Officers should be doing, why they should be doing it, and how they actually do it. However, it should not be taken as the definitive study. It has expressed an issue, not resolved it. There are clear implications and a need to identify and implement unified standards of practice if the service is to develop a consistent professional identity.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Chronology

1833 Factory Act. Children under 9 prohibited from working in mines and factories.
1844 Ragged School Union
1862 Revised School Code
1870 Elementary Education Act (Forster). Created school boards
1875 Factory Act widening scope of 1833 Act
1876 Education Act (Sandon). School age fixed at 10. Employment of children in school hours prohibited.
1880 Education Act (Mundella)
1884 The National Association of Board Officers formed (at first School Board Officers' Mutual Association)
1884 Children's Country Holiday Fund set up
1888 Local Government Act. Set up County and County Borough Councils
1890 Revised Code changed – increased emphasis on school attendance
1891 Education Act. All fees abolished in schools except where higher than ten shillings
1893 Elementary Education Act. School-leaving age raised to 11 from 1894
1899 Board of Education established
1899 School-leaving age raised to 12
1900 Elementary Education Act. Empowered Boards to compel school attendance to 14, but with many exceptions
1899 – 1902 Boer War
1902 Education Act. Abolished school boards and passed education to County and County boroughs.
1903 Employment of Children Act
1904 Medical Officers of Health set up nationally
1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act
1907 Education (Administrative Provisions) Act. Medical Inspections in schools
1908 Children's Act. Allowed for removal of neglected children from their homes
1911 Unemployment and Insurance Act. Unemployment and health insurance for several millions wage-earners, though not their dependents
1914 – 18 First World War
1918 Education Act (Fisher). Compulsory school attendance to 14. Child labour prohibited in factories and mines
1918 Maternity and Child Welfare Act
1919 Ministry of Health formed
1922 Section 8(1) of the Education Act 1918 brought into force, ending all exemptions from school attendance up to age of 14
1926 Hadow Report. Recommended post primary education from 11 to 18 or 19, secondary education and the 11 plus exam. No reference to school attendance.
1929 Crash of the New York Stock Exchange – Depression.
1933 3 million unemployed
1933 Children and Young Persons Act. Prevention of Cruelty to Children, of children begging, children in bars.
1936 Education Act
1938 Children and Young Persons Act
1939 National Association changes name to to Education Welfare officers' National Association (EWONA),

1939 – 45 Second World War: evacuation of children
1942 Beveridge Report
1944 Education Act (Butler). Restructured education into 3 groups: primary, secondary and further education
1946 NHS Act. Start of Family Allowances.
1947 School-leaving age raised to 15
1948 Start of NHS
1960 Report on the employment of Children in the Theatre, Films and Ballet.
1962 Education Act
1963 Newsom Report
1963 Local Government Act
1963 Certificate in Education Welfare introduced
1965 Child Poverty Action Group set up
1967 Bedford Report
1967 Plowden Report
1968 Seebohm Report
1970 British Association of Social Workers formed. EWONA remains independent
1971 Abolition of free school milk
1971 Local Social Services Act becomes law. Social Services Departments set up, with comprehensive social work powers.
1971 National working Party of the Local Government Training Board (under Ralphs) on the Training of Education Welfare Officers.
1971 Ralphs Report.
1972 School-leaving age raised to 16.
1973 EWONA Conference instructs National Council to prepare a case for parity of salary with other social workers
1975 National agreement bringing education social workers' pay into line with mainstream social workers
1976 Education Act
1977 Title of EWONA changed to the National Association of Social Workers in Education. NASWE starts new policies and approaches
1981 Physical punishment abolished in all schools
1982 Unemployment passes 3 million
1988 Education Reform Act
1989 Children Act
1993 Education Act
1996 Education Act
1998 Crime and Disorder Act: police can now take truanting pupils found in public places back to school or to another place designated by LEA.

(Williamson et al., 2001: 173-176)

APPENDIX B

Strictly Confidential

Questionnaire to Education Welfare Officers/Education Social Workers

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Question 1

What is your professional title: **(please tick box)**

Education Welfare Officer ☐

Education Social Worker ☐

Other (please specify) _____

Question 2

(please state)

How many years have you worked in the Education Welfare Service? ☐

If less than one year please state how many months ☐

Question 3

Are you employed as a full-time or part-time EWO/ESW?

(please tick box)

full-time ☐ **part-time** ☐

If you are employed part-time please state:

Term time only ☐ **or number of hours** ☐

Question 4

Which of the following qualifications do you possess? **(please tick box)**

CQSW/Dip.SW ☐

Certificate of Education Welfare ☐

Degree ☐

Higher degree (MA, MSc, M.Phil.) ☐

PGCE/B.Ed. ☐

Other (please state) _____

Question 5

Please use key words/phrase to summarise how you see the role of the EWO/ESW:

_____

Question 6

What was your main career before joining the service? (please state below)

_____

Question 7

Have you found skills acquired from your previous career useful to you as a practising EWO/ESW? **(please tick box)**

yes ☐ **no** ☐

If yes, please specify which skill/s _____

_____

Question 8

What training did you receive when you first joined the service?(please tick box)

Shadowing a more experienced officer for one week ☐

Shadowing a more experienced officer for two weeks ☐

Induction programme with sessions once a week ☐

Induction programme with sessions once a month ☐

One full week induction programme ☐

Other (please state) _____

Question 9

How many in-service training sessions have you attended in the past 12 months?

(please tick box)

0	☐
1-3	☐
4-6	☐
More than 6	☐

Question 10

In general, do you feel that you received adequate training during the first year as a practising EWO? **(please tick box)**

yes	no
☐	☐

Question 11

In particular, can you state an area of training that you have had during the past year that was particularly useful to you? (please tick box)

yes	no
☐	☐

If yes, please specify and explain why _____

_____

_____

Question 12

Can you state an area of training that you have had during the past year that was not particularly useful to you? (please tick box)

yes	no
☐	☐

If yes, please specify and explain why _____

_____

_____

Question 13

Please identify areas of your work (if any) that you feel would benefit from training programmes (please specify)

_____

_____

_____

Question 14

Please indicate any duties that are included in your daily working practice:

	(please tick box)		
	frequently	occasionally	never
Home visits	☐	☐	☐
Visiting schools	☐	☐	☐
Arranging/attending meetings between school/parents	☐	☐	☐
Employment of school-age children	☐	☐	☐
Presenting court cases on behalf of the LEA	☐	☐	☐
Supervising officer on Education Supervision Orders	☐	☐	☐
Supporting excluded pupils until alternative place found	☐	☐	☐
Supporting children with SEN	☐	☐	☐
Arranging home tuition (including education otherwise)	☐	☐	☐
Escorting pupils to day school	☐	☐	☐
Escorting pupils to and from residential school	☐	☐	☐
Arranging free school meals	☐	☐	☐
Arranging clothing grants	☐	☐	☐
Attending meetings on behalf of LEA e.g. case conferences,	☐	☐	☐
Administration e.g. letter writing	☐	☐	☐
Child protection	☐	☐	☐
Attending inter-agency panel e.g. Youth Justice Panel	☐	☐	☐

Other (please state) _____

Question 15

a) As an officer do you specialise in a specific area of education social work? E.g. child protection, employment of school-age children etc.

(please tick box)

yes ☐ no ☐

b) If yes please state which area: _____

Question 16

For how many schools do you have responsibility as an EWO/ESW? (please state)

Secondary ☐

Middle ☐

Primary ☐

Special ☐

Question 17

From whom do you take your referrals?

(please tick box)

	frequently	occasionally	never
Parent/s	☐	☐	☐
Guardian/Carer	☐	☐	☐
Social Services	☐	☐	☐
Youth Justice team	☐	☐	☐
From the school - Head teacher	☐	☐	☐
Deputy Head	☐	☐	☐
Head of Year	☐	☐	☐
Teacher	☐	☐	☐

Other (please state) _____

Question 18

Please state below:

Maximum number of active cases: ☐

Current number of active cases: ☐

Question 19

Range of interventions you use when working with school non-attenders:

	(please tick box) frequently	occasionally	never
Writing letters to parents	☐	☐	☐
Home visits – interview/advise parents	☐	☐	☐
School meeting between HOY, parents, pupil, EWO/ESW	☐	☐	☐
Meeting at ESW office between EWO/ESW, pupil, parents.	☐	☐	☐
Negotiate in-school measures e.g. modified curriculum	☐	☐	☐
change of class	☐	☐	☐
arrange contact person in school	☐	☐	☐
arrange for support in class	☐	☐	☐
attendance chart	☐	☐	☐
offer incentives, rewards	☐	☐	☐
other (please state) _____			
Counselling pupil/parent	☐	☐	☐
One to one work (please state)	☐	☐	☐
Advise on welfare rights	☐	☐	☐
Engage in joint agency work	☐	☐	☐
Group work	☐	☐	☐
Participate in truancy patrols with local police	☐	☐	☐
Arranging day trips in school holidays	☐	☐	☐
Refer to pupil referral unit/education support centre	☐	☐	☐
Refer to Disaffected Pupil Project	☐	☐	☐
Refer to Children Out of School Panel (Education Otherwise)	☐	☐	☐
Other (please state) _____			

Question 20

How often do you receive supervision from your line manager?
(please tick box)

- Weekly ☐
- Fortnightly ☐
- Three weeks ☐
- Monthly ☐
- None ☐

Question 21

How many cases have you referred for prosecution/ESO in the past 12 months?
(please tick box)

- 0 ☐
- 1 ☐
- 2 ☐
- 3 ☐
- 4+ ☐

Question 22

For how many Education Supervision Orders are you currently the supervising officer (if any)? (please tick box)

- 0 ☐
- 1 ☐
- 2 ☐
- 3+ ☐

Question 23

What aspect of your work for the EWS may contribute to a model of good working practice e.g. ability to communicate and engage with young people, group work, working with pupils at risk of exclusion, creating effective links with other agencies such as Social Services etc.?

(please state) _____

_____

_____

Question 24

What do you consider to be the area needing most review and development in your EWS (if any)?

(please state)_____

_____

Question 25

In discussion with EWO/ESWs it became apparent there is a need for nationally recognised guidelines with regard to our working practice, ensuring equality of service delivery for the client and equality of training opportunity for the officer. Therefore, in order to obtain the necessary information, I need 25 officers from different authorities to take part in the next stage of this study who will allow me to monitor and observe 4 cases from their current caseload over a 6-month period.

This should not involve extra work for the officer apart from requiring a minimum amount of time updating a 'case log sheet' (example available on request) and to meet at your office to discuss the progress of the 4 cases (maximum number of 3 occasions for half an hour). All data collected will be treated in the strictest confidence. Those who take part will receive a summary of the results and recommendations of my report to NASWE and Unison. Would you be willing to participate further in this study? (please tick box)

yes ☐ **no** ☐

If yes, please give details below:

Name: _____

Contact details: Address/telephone number/Email address

_____

_____

Question 26

Please add any comments that you may wish to make in the context of this study:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank-you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix C – Geographical locale local education authorities participating in study.

Outer London Borough of Redbridge is situated east of central London. It has a population of 234,200 and ethnic minority grouping is as follows:
White 68%
Indian 14%
Pakistani 5%
Black Caribbean 30%
Black African 2%
Bangladeshi 2%
Other Asian 2%
Black Other 1%
Other 3%
Chinese 1%

Redbridge has a total of 73 schools serving the area.

Outer London Borough of Barking and Dagenham is situated east of central London. It has a total population of 156,000 and ethnicminority grouping is as follows:
White 87.9%
Black Caribbean 1.8%
Black African 2%
Black Other 0.7%
Indian 2.6%
Pakistani 2.1%
Bangladeshi 0.6%
Chinese 0.4%
Other Asian 0.6%
Others 1.1%

Barking and Dagenham has a total of 50 schools serving the area.

The Inner London Borough of Tower Hamlets is situated in the East End of London. It has a total population of 190.154 and ethnic minority grouping is as follows:
White 55.8%
Bangladeshi 28.6%
Asian Other 1.3%
Black Caribbean 3.6%
Black African 3.2%
Black Other 1.8%
Chinese 1.1%
Indian 1.2%
Pakistani 1.2%
Other 2.2%

Tower Hamlets has a total of 102 schools serving the area.

Hertfordshire County Council is situated in the South East of England, north of London. Two thirds of Herts rural area is Green Belt. It has a total population of over one million and ethnic minority grouping is as follows:
White 96%
Ethnic 4%

Hertfordshire is served by 108 schools.

Appendix D – Responses to question 24.

'What do you consider to be the area needing most review and development in your EWS (if any)?'

1. Help for the long-term non-attender to get back into full-time education.
2. Work towards helping child reach full potential
3. Overload of paperwork
4. Other education departments/school weakness i.e. the system
5. Working with fewer schools
6. Funding for further education the EWS
7. Working practice of the EWO ensuring each officer works the same
8. Cross over when colleague leaves and another commences
9. Induction training
10. Greater focus on social work practices
11. Less emphasis on prosecutions
12. Coherent job description
13. Caseload management/weighting
14. Administrative support needed
15. Filing/files
16. Efficiency of paperwork
17. Statutory work
18. Clarification of role
19. Respect within the authority
20. Structure of service
21. How referrals are taken and responded too
22. Outcomes – who do they support – proof of need for service or do they provide best opportunity for child?
23. Dissemination of good practice
24. Keeping case notes/case monitoring
25. Training
26. Record keeping
27. Measuring effectiveness
28. Working with families
29. Appropriate educational provision for child in distress
30. Preventative work,m which cannot be assessed but if stopped we may become a crisis management agency
31. Inter-agency work to be more effective in working together
32. Review of EWS i.e. intake system, reduced caseloads
33. Specialist posts i.e. Court Officer. Child Protection
34. Training
35. Consistency of working practice i.e. fairness in the approaches used with young people
36. Guidelines for EWS
37. Guidelines for schools
38. Need to work closer with primary schools
39. Procedures and practice
40. Court procedures
41. Drug related problems
42. All staff to have relevant qualification
43. One title for all EWOs instead of EWO/ESWs
44. Time management
45. Prioritising
46. Chairing meetings
47. Telephoning
48. Writing letters
49. Development to fully qualified service
50. Streamlining working practices so that records and forms are simple and time is available for reading all the up to date information relating to the job in order to do casework effectively.

Appendix E: Search Institute has identified a framework of 40 developmental assets for elementary-age children (ages 6 to 11) that blends Search Institute's research on developmental assets for adolescents with research on healthy child development. For more information, see *What Young Children Need to Succeed* (Free Spirit, 2000).

Asset Category	Asset Name	Asset Definition
EXTERNAL ASSETS		
Support	**1. Family support**	Family life provides high levels of love and support.
	2. Positive family communication	Parents and children communicate positively. Children are willing to seek advice and counsel from their parents.
	3. Other adult relationships	Children have support from adults other than their parents.
	4. Caring neighborhood	Children experience caring neighbors.
	5. Caring out-of-home climate	School and other activities provide caring, encouraging environments for children.
	6. Parent involvement in out-of-home situations	Parents are actively involved in helping children succeed in school and in other situations outside the home.
Empowerment	**7. Community values children**	Children feel that the family and community value and appreciate children.
	8. Children are given useful roles	Children are included in age-appropriate family tasks and decisions and are given useful roles at home and in the community.

	9. Service to others	Children serve others in the community with their family or in other settings.
	10. Safety	Children are safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.
Boundaries and Expectations	**11. Family boundaries**	The family has clear rules and consequences and monitors children's activities and whereabouts.
	12. Out-of-home boundaries	Schools and other out-of-home environments provide clear rules and consequences.
	13. Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring children's behavior.
	14. Adult role models	Parents and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
	15. Positive peer interaction and influence	Children interact with other children who model responsible behavior and have opportunities to play and interact in safe, well-supervised settings.
	16. Appropriate expectations for growth	Adults have realistic expectations for children's development at this age. Parents, caregivers, and other adults encourage children to achieve and develop their unique talents.
Constructive Use of Time	**17. Creative activities**	Children participate in music, art, drama, or other creative activities for at least three hours a week at home and elsewhere.
	18. Out-of-home activities	Children spend one hour or more each week in extracurricular school activities or structured community programs.
	19. Religious community	The family attends religious programs or services for at least one hour per week.

	20. Positive, supervised time at home	Children spend most evenings and weekends at home with their parents in predictable, enjoyable routines.
INTERNAL ASSETS		
Commitment to Learning	**21. Achievement expectation and motivation**	Children are motivated to do well in school and other activities.
	22. Children are engaged in learning	Children are responsive, attentive, and actively engaged in learning.
	23. Stimulating activity and homework	Parents and teachers encourage children to explore and engage in stimulating activities. Children do homework when it's assigned.
	24. Enjoyment of learning and bonding to school	Children enjoy learning and care about their school.
	25. Reading for pleasure	Children and an adult read together for at least 30 minutes a day. Children also enjoy reading or looking at books or magazines on their own.
Positive Values	**26. Caring**	Children are encouraged to help other people.
	27. Equality and social justice	Children begin to show interest in making the community a better place.
	28. Integrity	Children begin to act on their convictions and stand up for their beliefs.
	29. Honesty	Children begin to value honesty and act accordingly.
	30. Responsibility	Children begin to accept and take personal responsibility for age-appriate tasks

		appropriate tasks.
	31. Healthy lifestyle and sexual attitudes	Children begin to value good health habits and learn healthy sexual attitudes and beliefs as well as respect for others.
Social Competencies	**32. Planning and decision making**	Children begin to learn how to plan ahead and make choices at appropriate developmental levels.
	33. Interpersonal skills	Children interact with adults and children and can make friends. Children express and articulate feelings in appropriate ways and empathize with others.
	34. Cultural competence	Children know about and are comfortable with people of different cultural, racial, and/or ethnic backgrounds.
	35. Resistance skills	Children start developing the ability to resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
	36. Peaceful conflict resolution	Children try to resolve conflicts nonviolently.
Positive Identity	**37. Personal power**	Children begin to feel they have control over things that happen to them. They begin to manage frustrations and challenges in ways that have positive results for themselves and others.
	38. Self-esteem	Children report having high self-esteem.
	39. Sense of purpose	Children report that their lives have purpose and actively engage their skills.
	40. Positive view of personal future	Children are hopeful and positive about their personal future.

Appendix F – 'Ideal' professional preparation course for Education Welfare Officers. Developed from data analysed in this study.

First is an emphasis on laying firm foundations of an understanding of the role, newly appointed EWOs should be allowed to shadow an experienced EWO for two weeks followed by a week of undertaking first day absence response calls to parents on behalf of the school. First week must include information on EWS ethics and confidentiality. It is important at this stage for the EWO to read as much literature as possible around the subject of non-attendance. Subsequent weeks would be supervised weekly. All face-to-face contacts with parents and young people would be undertaken as a joint meeting with EWO and supervisor until it is decided by the manager the officer is competent to conduct such meetings.

Over a twelve-month period a diploma course would provide modules on child protection, court procedures including producing a witness statement, special education needs, child employment and entertainment licences, school admissions and exclusion procedures, appeal procedure and advising families on how to claim welfare benefits.

Concentrated areas should be: school attendance problems; statutory requirements; behavioural problems and exclusions; all issues young people face i.e. disaffection, careers choice, teenage pregnancy, drug dependency, homelessness, young offenders, supporting young people in and leaving care as well as young people with special education needs. Training should focus on effective strategies and interventions used to re-engage young people in education as well as approaches to improve individual school attendance.

Skills to be developed:
Engaging with young people
Interpersonal communication
Observation techniques
Analysis of situations, personal experiences and issues
Decision-making
Recording and writing
Maintaining working relationships with school staff and other agencies
Presentation skills.

Knowledge required:
Purpose, models, methods and settings of working practice style suited to engaging with young people and their families.
Child Psychology
Ethical and moral issues
Law, statutory duties, powers and legal principles.
Philosophy of education
School organisation
Registration computerised systems
National Curriculum design and delivery
Teaching methods and classroom techniques
Work-related learning
Local resources for dealing with non-attendance
LEA procedures.